

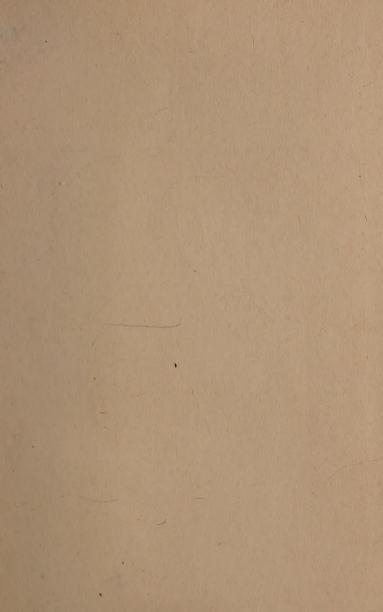
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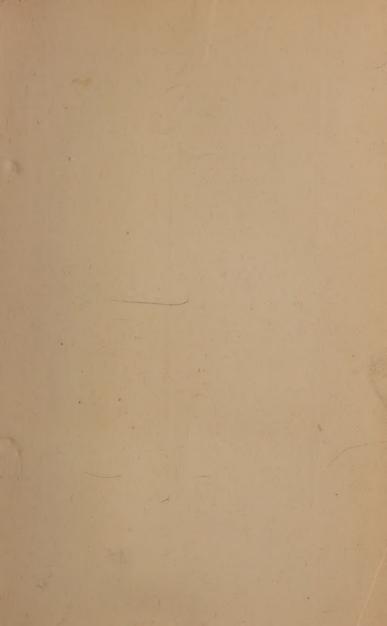
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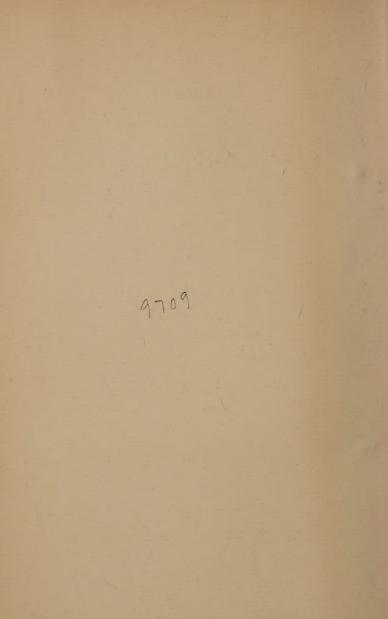
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CONTENTS

I.	COMEDIES, TRAG	EDIES,	AND	MAS	QUES		PAGE
II.	MISCELLANEOUS	WORKS	s .	•		,	91
III.	DISCOVERIES.						127



I COMEDIES, TRAGEDIES AND MASQUES



COMEDIES, TRAGEDIES, AND MASQUES

IF poets may be divided into two exhaustive but not exclusive classes,—the gods of harmony and creation, the giants of energy and invention,-the supremacy of Shakespeare among the gods of English verse is not more unquestionable than the supremacy of Jonson among its giants. Shakespeare himself stands no higher above Milton and Shelley than Jonson above Dryden and Byron. Beside the towering figure of this Enceladus the stature of Dryden seems but that of an ordinary man, the stature of Byron-who indeed can only be classed among giants by a somewhat licentious or audacious use of metaphor—seems little higher than a dwarf's. Not even the ardour of his most fanatical worshippers, from the date of Cartwright and Randolph to the date of Gilchrist and Gifford, could exaggerate the actual greatness of his various and marvellous energies. No giant ever came so

near to the ranks of the gods: were it possible for one not born a god to become divine by dint of ambition and devotion, this glory would have crowned the Titanic labours of Ben Jonson. There is something heroic and magnificent in his lifelong dedication of all his gifts and all his powers to the service of the art he had elected as the business of all his life and the aim of all his aspiration. And the result also was magnificent: the flowers of his growing have every quality but one which belongs to the rarest and finest among flowers: they have colour, form, variety, fertility, vigour: the one thing they want is fragrance. Once or twice only in all his indefatigable career of toil and triumph did he achieve what was easily and habitually accomplished by men otherwise unworthy to be named in the same day with him; by men who would have avowed themselves unworthy to unloose the latchets of his shoes. That singing power which answers in verse to the odour of a blossom, to the colouring of a picture, to the flavour of a fruit,—that quality without which they may be good, commendable, admirable, but cannot be delightful,—was not, it should seem, a natural gift of this great writer's: hardly now and then could his industry attain to it by some exceptional touch

of inspiration or of luck. It is 'above all strangeness' that a man labouring under this habitual disqualification should have been competent to recognize with accurate and delicate discernment an occasion on which he had for once risen above his usual capacity—a shot by which he had actually hit the white: but the lyrical verses which Ben Jonson quoted to Drummond as his best have exactly the quality which lyrical verse ought to have and which their author's lyrical verse almost invariably misses; the note of apparently spontaneous, inevitable, irrepressible and impeccable music. They might have been written by Coleridge or Shelley. But Ben, as a rule,-a rule which is proved by the exception—was one of the singers who could not sing; though, like Dryden, he could intone most admirably; which is more and much more—than can truthfully be said for Byron. He, however, as well as Dryden, has one example of lyrical success to show for himself, as exceptional and as unmistakable as Jonson's. The incantation in Œdipus, brief as it is, and the first four stanzas of the incantation in Manfred, imitative as they are, reveal a momentary sense of music, a momentary command of the instrument employed, no less singular and no less absolute.

But Jonson, at all points the greatest and most genuine poet of the three, has achieved such a success more than once; has nearly achieved it, or has achieved a success only less absolute than this, more than a few times in the course of his works. And it should be remembered always that poetry in any other sense than the sense of invention or divination, creation by dint of recollection and by force of reproduction, was by no means the aim and end of his ambition. The grace, the charm, the magic of poetry was to him always a secondary if not always an inconsiderable quality in comparison with the weight of matter, the solidity of meaning, the significance and purpose of the thing suggested or presented. The famous men whose names may most naturally and most rationally be coupled with the more illustrious name of Ben Jonson came short of the triumph which might have been theirs in consequence of their worst faults or defects-of the weaker and baser elements in their moral nature; because they preferred self-interest in the one case and self-indulgence in the other to the noble toil and the noble pleasure of doing their best for their art's sake and their duty's, to the ultimate satisfaction of their conscience; a guide as sure and a

monitor as exacting in æsthetic matters—or, to use a Latin rather than a Greek word, in matters of pure intelligence—as in questions of ethics or morality. But with Ben Ionson conscience was the first and last consideration: the conscience of power which undoubtedly made him arrogant and exacting made him even more severe in self-exaction, more resolute in self-discipline, more inexorable in self-devotion to the elected labour of his life From others he exacted much; but less than he exacted from himself. And it is to this noble uprightness of mind, to this lofty loyalty in labour, that the gravest vices and the most serious defects of his work may indisputably be traced. Reversing the famous axiom of Goldsmith's professional art-critic, we may say of Jonson's work in almost every instance that the picture would have been better if the artist had taken less pains. For in some cases at least he writes better as soon as he allows himself to write with ease—or at all events without elaborate ostentation of effort and demonstrative prodigality of toil. The unequalled breadth and depth of his reading could not but enrich as well as encumber his writings: those who could wish he had been less learned may be reminded how much we should

certainly lose—how much of solid and precious metal-for the mere chance of a possible gain in spontaneity and ease; in qualities of lyrical or dramatic excellence which it is doubtful whether he had received from nature in any degree comparable with those to which his learning gave a fresh impulse and a double force of energetic life. And when his work is at its worst, when his faults are most flagrant, when his tediousness is most unendurable, it is not his learning that is to blame, for his learning is not even apparent. The obtrusion and accumulation of details and references, allusions and citations, which encumber the text and the margin of his first Roman tragedy with such a ponderous mass of illustrative superfluity, may undoubtedly be set down, if not to the discredit, at least to the disadvantage of the poet whose resolute caprice had impelled him to be author and commentator, dramatist and scholiast, at once: but however tedious a languid or a cursory reader may find this part of Jonson's work, he must, if not abnormally perverse in stupidity, admit that it is far less wearisome, less vexatious, less deplorable and insufferable, than the interminable deserts of dreary dialogue in which the affectations, pretentions, or idiocies of the period are subjected

to the indefatigable and the lamentable industry of a caricaturist or a photographer.

There is nothing accidental in the work of Ben Jonson: no casual inspiration, no fortuitous impulse, ever guides or misguides his genius aright or astray. And this crowning and damning defect of a tedious and intolerable realism was even exceptionally wilful and premeditated. There is little if anything of it in the earliest comedy admitted into the magnificent edition which was compiled and published by himself in the year of the death of Shakespeare. And the humours of a still earlier comedy attributed to his hand, The Case and printed apparently without his sanc- is Altered. tion just seven years before, are not worked out with such wearisome patience nor exhibited with such scientific persistency as afterwards distinguished the anatomical lecturer on vice and folly whose ideal of comic art was a combination of sarcasm and sermon in alternately epigrammatic and declamatory dialogue. I am by no means disposed to question the authenticity of this play, an excellent example of romantic comedy dashed with farce and flavoured with poetry: but, as far as I am aware, no notice has yet been taken of a noticeable coincidence between the manner or the circumstances of its publication and that of a spurious play which had nine years previously been attributed to Shakespeare. Some copies only of The Case is Altered bear on the title-page the name of Jonson, as some copies only of Sir John Oldcastle bear on the title-page the name of Shakespeare. In the earlier case, there can of course be no reasonable doubt that Shakespeare on his side, or the four actual authors of the gallimaufry on theirs, or perhaps all five together in the common though diverse interest of their respective credits, must have interfered to put a stop to the piratical profits of a lying and thieving publisher by compelling him to cancel the impudently mendacious titlepage which imputed to Shakespeare the authorship of a play announced in its very prologue as the work of a writer or writers whose intention was to counteract the false impression given by Shakespeare's caricature, and to represent Prince Hal's old lad of the castle in his proper character of hero and martyr. In the later case, there can be little if any doubt that Jonson, then at the height of his fame and influence, must have taken measures to preclude the circulation under his name of a play which he would not or could not honestly acknowledge. So far, then, as external evidence goes, there is no

ground whatever for a decision as to whether The Case is Altered may be wholly or partially or not at all assignable to the hand of Jonson. My own conviction is that he certainly had a hand in it, and was not improbably its sole author: but that on the other hand it may not impossibly be one of the compound works on which he was engaged as a dramatic apprentice with other and less energetic playwrights in the dim back workshop of the slavedealer and slave-driver whose diary records the grinding toil and the scanty wages of his lean and laborious bondsmen. Justice, at least since the days of Gifford, has generally been done to the bright and pleasant quality of this equally romantic and classical comedy; in which the passionate humour of the miser is handled with more freshness and freedom than we find in most of Jonson's later studies, while the figure of his putative daughter has more of grace and interest than he usually vouchsafed to be at the pains of bestowing on his official heroines. It is to be regretted, it is even to be deplored, that the influence of Plautus on the style and the method of Jonson was not more permanent and more profound. Had he been but content to follow his first impulse, to work after his earliest model—had he happily preferred those 'Plautinos et numeros et sales' for which his courtly friend Horace expressed so courtierly a contempt to the heavier numbers and the more laborious humours which he set himself to elaborate and to cultivate instead, we might not have had to applaud a more wonderful and admirable result, we should unquestionably have enjoyed a harvest more spontaneous and more gracious, more generous and more delightful. Something of the charm of Fletcher, his sweet straightforward fluency and instinctive lightness of touch, would have tempered the severity and solidity of his deliberate satire and his heavy-handed realism.

And the noble work of comic art which followed on this first attempt gave even fuller evidence in its earlier than its later form of the author's capacity for poetic as well as realistic success. The defence of poetry which appears only in the first edition of Every Man in his Humour in his Humour.

Every Man is worth all Sidney's and all Shelley's treatises thrown together. A stern and austere devotion to the principle which prohibits all indulgence in poetry, precludes all exuberance of expression, and immolates on the altar of accuracy all eloquence, all passion, and all inspiration incompatible with direct and prosaic reproduc-

tion of probable or plausible dialogue, induced its author to cancel this noble and majestic rhapsody; and in so doing gave fair and full forewarning of the danger which was to beset this too rigid and conscientious artist through the whole of his magnificent career. But in all other points the process of transformation to which its author saw fit to subject this comedy was unquestionably a process of improvement. Transplanted from the imaginary or fantastic Italy in which at first they lived and moved and had their being to the actual and immediate atmosphere of contemporary London, the characters gain even more in lifelike and interesting veracity or verisimilitude than in familiar attraction and homely association. Not only do we feel that we know them better, but we perceive that they are actually more real and cognisable creatures than they were under their former conditions of dramatic existence. But it must be with regret as well as with wonder that we find ourselves constrained to recognize the indisputable truth that this first acknowledged work of so great a writer is as certainly his best as it certainly is not his greatest. Never again did his genius, his industry, his conscience and his taste unite in the triumphant presentation of a work so faultless, so

satisfactory, so absolute in achievement and so free from blemish or defect. The only three others among all his plays which are not unworthy to be ranked beside it are in many ways more wonderful, more splendid, more incomparable with any other product of human intelligence or genius: but neither The Fox, The Alchemist, nor The Staple of News, is altogether so blameless and flawless a piece of work; so free from anything that might as well or better be dispensed with, so simply and thoroughly compact and complete in workmanship and in result. Molière himself has no character more exquisitely and spontaneously successful in presentation and evolution than the immortal and inimitable Bobadil: and even Bobadil is not unworthily surrounded and supported by the many other graver or lighter characters of this magnificent and perfect comedy.

It is difficult to attempt an estimate of the next endeavours or enterprises of Ben Jonson without incurring either the risk of impatient and uncritical injustice, if rein be given to the natural irritation and vexation of a disappointed and bewildered reader, or the no less imminent risk of one-sided and one-eyed partiality, if the superb literary quality, the elaborate intellectual excellence, of these undramatic if not inartistic satires in dialogue be duly taken into account. From their author's point of view, they are worthy of all the applause he claimed for them; and to say this is to say much; but if the author's point of view was radically wrong, was fundamentally unsound, we can but be divided between condemnation and applause, admiration and regret. No student of our glorious language, no lover of our glorious literature, can leave these miscalled comedies unread without foregoing an experience which he should be reluctant to forego: but no reader who has any sense or any conception of comic art or of dramatic harmony will be surprised to find that the author's experience of their reception on the stage should have driven him by steady gradations of fury and consecutive degrees of arrogance into a state of mind and a style of work which must have seemed even to his well-wishers most unpromising for his future and final triumph. Little if anything can be added to the excellent critical remarks of Gifford on Every Man out of his Humour, Cynthia's Revels, and Poetaster, or his Arraignment. The first of these magnificent mistakes would be enough to ensure immortality to the genius of the poet capable of so superb and

elaborate an error. The fervour and intensity of the verse which expresses his loftier mood of intolerant indignation, the studious and Every Man out implacable versatility of scorn which aniof his Humour. mates the expression of his disgust at the viler or crueller examples of social villainy then open to his contemptuous or furious observation, though they certainly cannot suffice to make a play, suffice. to make a living and imperishable work of the dramatic satire which passes so rapidly from one phase to another of folly, fraud, or vice. And if it were not an inadmissible theory that the action or the structure of a play might be utterly disjointed and dislocated in order to ensure the complete presentation or development, the alternate exhibition or exposure, of each figure in the revolving gallery of a satirical series, we could hardly fear that our admiration of the component parts which fail to compose a coherent or harmonious work of art could possibly carry us too far into extravagance of applause. The noble rage which inspires the overture is not more absolute or perfect than the majestic structure of the verse: and the best comic or realistic scenes of the ensuing play are worthy to be compared—though it may not be altogether to their advantage—with the similar

work of the greatest succeeding artists in narrative or dramatic satire. Too much of the studious humour, too much of the versatile and laborious realism, displayed in the conduct and evolution of this satirical drama, may have been lavished and misused in the reproduction of ephemeral affectations and accidental forms of folly: but whenever the dramatic satirist, on purpose or by accident, strikes home to some deeper and more durable subject of satire, we feel the presence and the power of a poet and a thinker whose genius was not born to deal merely with ephemeral or casual matters. The small patrician fop and his smaller plebeian ape, though even now not undiverting figures, are inevitably less diverting to us, as they must have been even to the next generation from Jonson's, than to the audience for whom they were created: but the humour of the scene in which the highly intelligent and intellectual lady, who regards herself as the pattern at once of social culture and of personal refinement, is duped and disgraced by an equally simple and ingenious trick played off on her overweening and contemptuous vanity, might have been applauded by Shakespeare or by Vanbrugh, approved by Congreve or Molière. Here, among too many sketches of a kind which

can lay claim to no merit beyond that of an unlovely photograph, we find a really humorous conception embodied in a really amusing type of vanity and folly; and are all the more astonished to find a writer capable of such excellence and such error as every competent reader must recognize in the conception and execution of this rather admirable than delightful play. For Molière himself could hardly have improved on the scene in which a lady who is confident of her intuitive capacity to distinguish a gentleman from a pretender with no claim to that title is confronted with a vulgar clown, whose introducers have assured her that he is a high-bred gentleman masquerading for a wager under that repulsive likeness. She wonders that they can have imagined her so obtuse, so ignorant, so insensible to the difference between gentleman and clown: she finds that he plays his part as a boor very badly and transparently; and on discovering that he is in fact the boor she would not recognize, is driven to vanish in a passion of disgust. This is good comedy: but we can hardly say as much for the scene in which a speculator who has been trading on the starvation or destitution of his neighbours and tenants is driven to hang himself in despair at the

tidings of a better market for the poor, is cut down by the hands of peasants who have not recognized him, and on hearing their loudly expressed regrets for this act of inadvertent philanthropy becomes at once a beneficent and penitent philanthropist. Extravagant and exceptional as is this instance of Tonson's capacity for dramatic error-for the sacrifice at once of comic art and of common sense on the altar of moral or satirical purpose, it is but an extreme example of the result to which his theory must have carried his genius, gagged and handcuffed and drugged and blindfolded, had not his genius been too strong even for the force and the persistence of his theory. No reader and no spectator of his next comedy can have been inclined to believe or encouraged in believing that it was. The famous final verse of the Cynthia's epilogue to Cynthia's Revels can hardly sound otherwise to modern ears than as an expression of blustering diffidence—of blatant self-distrust. That any audience should have sat out the five undramatic acts of this 'dramatic satire' is as inconceivable as that any reader, however exasperated and exhausted by its voluminous perversities, should fail to do justice to its literary merits; to the vigour and purity of its English, to the masculine refinement and the classic straightforwardness of its general style. There is an exquisite song in it, and there are passages—nav, there are scenes—of excellent prose: but the intolerable elaboration of pretentious dullness and ostentatious ineptitude for which the author claims not merely the tolerance or the condonation which gratitude or charity might accord to the misuse or abuse of genius, but the acclamation due to its exercise and the applause demanded by its triumph—the heavyheaded perversity which ignores all the duties and reclaims all the privileges of a dramatic poet—the Cyclopean ponderosity of perseverance which hammers through scene after scene at the task of ridicule by anatomy of tedious and preposterous futilities—all these too conscientious outrages offered to the very principle of comedy, of poetry, or of drama, make us wonder that we have no record of a retort from the exhausted audience—if haply there were any auditors left-to the dogged defiance of the epilogue:-

By God 'tis good, and if you like 't you may.

—By God 'tis bad, and worse than tongue can say.

For the most noticeable point in this studiously wayward and laboriously erratic design is that the principle of composition is as conspicuous by its absence as the breath of inspiration: that the artist, the scholar, the disciple, the student of classic models, is as indiscoverable as the spontaneous humourist or poet. The wildest, the roughest, the crudest offspring of literary impulse working blindly on the passionate elements of excitable ignorance was never more formless, more incoherent, more defective in structure, than this voluminous abortion of deliberate intelligence and conscientious culture.

There is a curious monotony in the variety if there be not rather a curious variety in the monotony—of character and of style which makes it even more difficult to resume the study of Cynthia's Revels when once broken off than even to read through its burdensome and bulky five acts at a sitting; but the reader who lays siege to it with a sufficient supply of patience will find that the latter is the surer if not the only way to appreciate the genuine literary value of its better portions. Most of the figures presented are less than sketches and little more than outlines of inexpert and intolerant caricature: but the 'halfsaved 'or (as Carlyle has it) 'insalvable' coxcomb and parasite Asotus, who puts himself under the tuition of Amorphus and the patronage of Anaides,

is a creature with something of real comic life in him. By what process of induction or deduction the wisdom of critical interpreters should have discerned in the figure of his patron, a fashionable ruffler and ruffian, the likeness of Thomas Dekker, a humble, hard-working, and highly-gifted hack of letters, may be explicable by those who can explain how the character of Hedon, a courtly and voluptuous coxcomb, can have been designed to cast ridicule on John Marston, a rude and roughhewn man of genius, the fellow-craftsman of Ben Ionson as satirist and as playwright. But such absurdities of misapplication and misconstruction, once set afloat on the Lethean waters of stagnating tradition, will float for ever by grace of the very rottenness which prevents them from sinking. Ignorance assumes and idleness repeats what sciolism ends by accepting as a truth no less indisputable than undisputed. To any rational and careful student it must be obvious that until the publication of Jonson's Poetaster we cannot trace, I do not say with any certainty of evidence, but with any plausibility of conjecture, the identity of the principal persons attacked or derided by the satirist. And to identify the originals of such figures as Clove and Orange in Every Man out of his Humour can hardly, as Carlyle might have expressed it, be matter of serious interest to any son of Adam. But the famous polemical comedy which appeared a year later than the appearance of Cynthia's Revels bore evidence about it, unmistakable by reader or spectator, alike to the general design of the poet and to the particular direction of his personalities. Jonson of course asserted and of course believed that he had undergone gross and incessant provocation for years past from the 'petulant' onslaughts of Marston and Dekker: but what were his grounds for this assertion and this belief we have no means whatever of deciding—we have no ground whatever for conjecture. What we cannot but perceive is the possibly more important fact that indignation and ingenuity, pugnacity and self-esteem, combined to produce and succeeded in producing an incomparably better comedy than the author's last and a considerably better composition than the author's penultimate attempt. Even the 'apologetical dialogue' appended for the benefit of the reader, fierce and arrogant as it seems to us in its bellicose ambition and its quarrelsome selfassertion, is less violent and overweening in its tone than the furious eloquence of the prelude to Every Man out of his Humour. The purity of passion, the sincerity of emotion, which inspires and inflames that singular and splendid substitute for an ordinary prologue, never found again an expression so fervent and so full in the many and various appeals of its author to his audience, immediate or imaginary, against the malevolence of enemies or of critics. But in this Augustan satire his rage and scorn are tempered and adapted to something of dramatic purpose; their expression is more coherent, if not less truculent,—their effect is more harmonious, if not more genuine,—than in the two preceding plays.

There is much in the work of Ben Jonson which may seem strange and perplexing to the most devout and rapturous admirer of his genius: there is nothing so singular, so quaint, so inexplicable, as his selection of Horace for a sponsor or a patron saint. The affinity between Virgil and Tennyson, between Shelley and Lucretius, is patent and palpable: but when Jonson assumes the mask of Horace we can only wonder what would have been the sensation on Olympus if Pluto had suddenly proposed to play the part of Cupid, or if Vulcan had obligingly offered to run on the errands of Mercury. This eccentricity of egoism

is only less remarkable than the mixture of care and recklessness in the composition of a play which presents us at its opening with an apparent hero in the person, not of Horace, but of Ovid; and after following his fortunes through four-fifths of the action, drops him into exile at the close of the fourth act, and proceeds with the business of the fifth as though no such figure had ever taken part in the conduct of the play. Shakespeare, who in Jonson's opinion 'wanted art,' assuredly never showed himself so insensible to the natural rules of art as his censor has shown himself here. Apart from the incoherence of construction which was perhaps inevitable in such a complication of serious with satirical design, there is more of artistic merit in this composite work of art than in any play produced by its author since the memorable date of Every Man in his Humour. The character of Captain Pantilius Tucca, which seems to have brought down on its creator such a boiling shower-bath or torrent of professional indignation from quarters in which his own distinguished service as a soldier and a representative champion of English military hardihood would seem to have been unaccountably if not scandalously forgotten, is beyond comparison the

brightest and the best of his inventions since the date of the creation of Bobadil. But the decrease in humanity of humour, in cordial and genial sympathy or tolerance of imagination, which marks the advance of his genius towards its culmination of scenical and satirical success in *The Alchemist* must be obvious at this stage of his work to those who will compare the delightful cowardice and the inoffensive pretention of Bobadil with the blatant vulgarity and the flagrant rascality of Tucca.

In the memorable year which brought into England her first king of Scottish birth, and made inevitable the future conflict between the revolutionary principle of monarchy by divine right and the conservative principle of self-government by deputy for the commonweal of England, the first great writer who thought fit to throw in his lot with the advocates of the royalist revolution pro-

duced on the boards a tragedy of which the moral, despite his conscious or unconscious efforts to disguise or to distort it, is as thoroughly republican and as tragically satirical of despotism as is that of Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*. It would be well for the fame of Jonson if the parallel could be carried further: but,

although Sejanus his Fall may not have received on its appearance the credit or the homage due to the serious and solid merit of its composition and its execution, it must be granted that the author has once more fallen into the excusable but nevertheless unpardonable error of the too studious and industrious Martha. He was careful and troubled about many things absolutely superfluous and supererogatory; matters of no value or concern whatever for the purpose or the import of a dramatic poem: but the one thing needful, the very condition of poetic life and dramatic interest, he utterly and persistently overlooked. Tiberius, the central character of the action—for the eponymous hero or protagonist of the play is but a crude study of covetous and lecherous ambition,-has not life enough in the presentation of him to inform the part with interest. No praise—of the sort which is due to such labours—can be too high for the strenuous and fervid conscience which inspires every line of the laborious delineation: the recorded words of the tyrant are wrought into the text, his traditional characteristics are welded into the action, with a patient and earnest fidelity which demands applause no less than recognition: but when we turn from this elaborate statuefrom this exquisitely articulated skeleton—to the living figure of Octavius or of Antony, we feel and understand more than ever that Shakespeare 'hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from him.'

Coleridge has very justly animadverted on 'the anachronic mixture' of Anglican or Caledonian royalism with the conservatism of an old Roman republican in the character of Arruntius: but we may trace something of the same incongruous combination in the character of a poet who was at once the sturdiest in aggressive eagerness of self-assertion, and the most copious in courtly effusion of panegyric, among all the distinguished writers of his day. The power of his verse and the purity of his English are nowhere more remarkable than in his two Roman tragedies: on the other hand, his great fault or defect as a dramatist is nowhere more perceptible. general if not universal infirmity is one which never seems to have occurred to him, careful and studious though he was always of his own powers and performances, as anything of a fault at all. It is one indeed which no writer afflicted with it could reasonably be expected to recognize or to repair. Of all purely negative faults, all sins of intellectual omission, it is perhaps the most serious and the most irremediable. It is want of sympathy; a lack of cordial interest, not in his own work or in his own genius,-no one will assert that Jonson was deficient on that score,—but in the individual persons, the men and women represented on the stage. He took so much interest in the creations that he had none left for the creatures of his intellect or art. This fault is not more obvious in the works of his disciples Cartwright and Randolph than in the works of their master. The whole interest is concentrated on the intellectual composition and the intellectual development of the characters and the scheme. Love and hatred, sympathy and antipathy, are superseded and supplanted by pure scientific curiosity: the clear glow of serious or humorous emotion is replaced by the dry light of analytical investigation. Si vis me flere—the proverb is something musty. Neither can we laugh heartily or long where all chance of sympathy or cordiality is absolutely inconceivable. The loving laughter which salutes the names of Dogberry and Touchstone, Mrs. Quickly and Falstaff, is never evoked by the most gorgeous opulence of humour, the most glorious audacity of intrigue, which dazzles and delights our under-

standing in the parts of Sir Epicure Mammon, Rabbi Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, Morose and Fitzdottrel and Mosca: even Bobadil, the most comically attractive of all cowards and braggarts on record, has no such hold on our regard as many a knave and many a fool of Shakespeare's comic progeny. The triumph of 'Don Face' over his confederates, though we may not be so virtuous as to grudge it him, puts something of a strain upon our conscience if it is heartily to be applauded and enjoyed. One figure, indeed, among all the multitude of Jonson's invention, is so magnificent in the spiritual stature of his wickedness, in the still dilating verge and expanding proportion of his energies, that admiration in this single case may possibly if not properly overflow into something of intellectual if not moral sympathy. The genius and the courage of Volpone, his sublimity of cynic scorn and his intensity of contemptuous enjoyment,—his limitless capacity for pleasure and his dauntless contemplation of his crimes,-make of this superb sinner a figure which we can hardly realize without some sense of imperious fascination. His views of humanity are those of Swift and of Carlyle: but in him their fruit is not bitterness of sorrow and anger, but rapture of satisfaction

and of scorn. His English kinsman, Sir Epicure Mammon, for all his wealth of sensual imagination and voluptuous eloquence, for all his living play of humour and glowing force of faith, is essentially but a poor creature when set beside the great Venetian. Had the study of Tiberius been informed and vivified by something of the same fervour, the tragedy of Sejanus might have had in it some heat of more than merely literary life. But this lesser excellence, the merit of vigorous and vigilant devotion or application to a high and serious object of literary labour, is apparent in every scene of the tragedy. That the subject is one absolutely devoid of all but historical and literary interest—that not one of these scenes can excite for one instant the least touch, the least phantom, the least shadow of pity or terrorwould apparently have seemed to its author no argument against its claim to greatness as a tragic But if it could be admitted, as it will never be by any unperverted judgment, that this eternal canon of tragic art, the law which defines terror and pity as its only proper objects, the alpha and omega of its aim and its design, may ever be disregarded or ignored, we should likewise have to admit that Jonson had in this instance achieved

a success as notable as we must otherwise consider his failure. For the accusation of weakness in moral design, of feeble or unnatural treatment of character, cannot with any show of justice be brought against him. Coleridge, whose judgment on a question of ethics will scarcely be allowed to carry as much weight as his authority on matters of imagination, objects with some vehemence to the incredible inconsistency of Sejanus in appealing for a sign to the divinity whose altar he proceeds to overthrow, whose power he proceeds to defy. on the appearance of an unfavourable presage. This doubtless is not the conduct of a strong man or a rational thinker: but the great minister of Tiberius is never for an instant throughout the whole course of the action represented as a man of any genuine strength or any solid intelligence. He is shown to us as merely a cunning, daring, unscrupulous and imperious upstart, whose greed and craft, impudence and audacity, intoxicate while they incite and undermine while they uplift him.

The year which witnessed the appearance of *Sejanus* on the stage—acclaimed by Chapman at greater length if not with greater fervour than by any other of Jonson's friends or satellites—

witnessed also the first appearance of its author in a character which undoubtedly gave free play to some of his most remarkable abilities, but which unquestionably diverted and distorted and absorbed his genius as a dramatist and his talent as

a poet after a fashion which no capable King student can contemplate without admira- James's Entertain. tion or consider without regret. The few ment.

readers whose patient energy and conscientious curiosity may have led them to traverse—a pilgrimage more painful than Dante's or than Bunvan's-the entire record of the 'Entertainment' which escorted and delayed, at so many successive stations, the progress through London and Westminster of the long-suffering son of Mary Queen of Scots, will probably agree that of the two poetic dialogues or eclogues contributed by Jonson to the metrical part of the ceremony, the dialogue of the Genius and the Flamen is better than that of the Genius and Thamesis; more smooth, more vigorous, and more original. The subsequent prophecy of Electra is at all points unlike the prophecies of a Cassandra: there is something doubly tragic in the irony of chance which put into the mouth of Agamemnon's daughter a prophecy of good fortune to the royal house of Stuart on its first entrance

into the capital and ascension to the throne of England. The subsequent *Panegyre* is justly *A Pane*. praised by Gifford for its manly and digsyre. nified style of official compliment—courtliness untainted by servility: but the style is rather that of fine prose, sedately and sedulously measured and modulated, than that of even ceremonial poetry.

In the same energetic year of his literary life the Laureate produced one of his best The Satyr. minor works—The Satyr, a little lyric drama so bright and light and sweet in fancy and in finish of execution that we cannot grudge the expenditure of time and genius on so slight a subject. The Penates, which appeared in Penates. the following year, gave evidence again of the strong and lively fancy which was to be but too often exercised in the same field of ingenious and pliant invention. The metre is well conceived and gracefully arranged, worthy indeed of nobler words than those which it clothes with light and pleasant melody. The octosyllabics, it will be observed by metrical students, are certainly good, but decidedly not faultless: the burlesque part sustained by Pan is equally dexterous and brilliant in execution.

In 1605 the singular and magnificent coalition of powers which served to build up the composite genius of Jonson displayed in a single masterpiece the consummate and crown- or The Fox. ing result of its marvellous energies. No other of even his very greatest works is at once so admirable and so enjoyable. The construction or composition of The Alchemist is perhaps more wonderful in the perfection and combination of cumulative detail, in triumphant simplicity of process and impeccable felicity of result: but there is in Volpone a touch of something like imagination, a savour of something like romance, which gives a higher tone to the style and a deeper interest to the action. The chief agents are indeed what Mr. Carlyle would have called 'unspeakably unexemplary mortals': but the serious fervour and passionate intensity of their resolute and resourceful wickedness give somewhat of a lurid and distorted dignity to the display of their doings and sufferings, which is wanting to the less gigantic and heroic villainies of Subtle, Dol, and Face. The absolutely unqualified and unrelieved rascality of every agent in the later comedy-unless an exception should be made in favour of the unfortunate though enterprising Surly—is another note of inferiority; a mark of comparative baseness in the dramatic metal. In *Volpone* the tone of villainy and the tone of virtue are alike higher. Celia is a harmless lady, if a too submissive consort; Bonario is an honourable gentleman, if too dutiful a son. The Puritan and shopkeeping scoundrels who are swindled by Face and plundered by Lovewit are viler if less villainous figures than the rapacious victims of Volpone.

As to the respective rank or comparative excellence of these two triumphant and transcendent masterpieces, the critic who should take upon himself to pass sentence or pronounce judgment would in my opinion display more audacity than discretion. The steadfast and imperturbable skill of hand which has woven so many threads of incident, so many shades of character, so many changes of intrigue, into so perfect and superb a pattern of incomparable art as dazzles and delights the reader of The Alchemist is unquestionably unique—above comparison with any later or earlier example of kindred genius in the whole range of comedy, if not in the whole world of fiction. The manifold harmony of inventive combination and imaginative contrast—the multitudinous unity of various and concordant effects—the complexity and the simplicity of action and impression, which hardly

allow the reader's mind to hesitate between enjoyment and astonishment, laughter and wonder, admiration and diversion-all the distinctive qualities which the alchemic cunning of the poet has fused together in the crucible of dramatic satire for the production of a flawless work of art, have given us the most perfect model of imaginative realism and satirical comedy that the world has ever seen; the most wonderful work of its kind that can ever be run upon the same lines. Nor is it possible to resist a certain sense of immoral sympathy and humorous congratulation, more keen than any Scapin or Mascarille can awake in the mind of a virtuous reader, when Face dismisses Surly with a promise to bring him word to his lodging if he can hear of 'that Face' whom Surly has sworn to mark for his if ever he meets him. From the date of Plautus to the date of Sheridan it would surely be difficult to find in any comedy a touch of glorious impudence which might reasonably be set against this. And the whole part is so full of brilliant and effective and harmonious touches or strokes of character or of humour that even this crowning instance of serene inspiration in the line of superhuman audacity seems merely right and simply natural.

And yet, even while possessed and overmastered by the sense of the incomparable energy, the impeccable skill, and the indefatigable craftsmanship, which combined and conspired together to produce this æsthetically blameless masterpiece the reader whose instinct requires something more than merely intellectual or æsthetic satisfaction must recognize even here the quality which distinguishes the genius of Ben Jonson from that of the very greatest imaginative humourists-Aristophanes or Rabelais, Shakespeare or Sterne, Vanbrugh or Dickens, Congreve or Thackeray. Each of these was evidently capable of falling in love with his own fancy-of rejoicing in his own imaginative humour as a swimmer in the waves he plays with: but this buoyant and passionate rapture was controlled by an instinctive sense which forbade them to strike out too far or follow the tide too long. However quaint or queer, however typical or exceptional, the figure presented may be-Olivia's or Tristram Shandy's uncle Toby, Sir John Brute or Mr. Peggotty, Lady Wishfort or Lady Kew,—we recognize and accept them as lifelike and actual intimates whose acquaintance has been made for life. Sir Sampson Legend might undoubtedly find himself as much out of place in the drawing-

room of the Countess Dowager of Kew as did Sir Wilful Witwoud, on a memorable occasion, in the saloon of his aunt Lady Wishfort: Captain Toby Shandy could hardly have been expected to tolerate the Rabelaisian effervescences of Sir Toby Belch: and Vanbrugh's typical ruffians of rank have little apparently in common with Dickens's representative heroes of the poor. But in all these immortal figures there is the lifeblood of eternal life which can only be infused by the sympathetic faith of the creator in his creature—the breath which animates every word, even if the word be not the very best word that might have been found, with the vital impulse of infallible imagination. But it is difficult to believe that Ben Jonson can have believed, even with some half sympathetic and half sardonic belief, in all the leading figures of his invention. Scorn and indignation are but too often the motives or the mainsprings of his comic art; and when dramatic poetry can exist on the sterile and fiery diet of scorn and indignation, we may hope to find life sustained in happiness and health on a diet of aperients and emetics. The one great modern master of analytic art is somewhat humaner than Jonson in the application of his scientific method to the purpose of dramatic satire. The

study of Sludge is finer and subtler by far than the study of Subtle; though undoubtedly it is, in consequence of that very perfection and sublimation of exhaustive analysis, less available for any but a monodramatic purpose. No excuse, no plea, no pretext beyond the fact of esurience and the sense of ability, is suggested for the villainy of Subtle, Dol, and Face. But if we were to see what might possibly be said in extenuation of their rogueries, to hear what might possibly be pleaded in explanation or condonation of their lives, the comedy would fall through and go to pieces: the dramatic effect would collapse and be dissolved. And to this great, single, æsthetic end of art the consummate and conscientious artist who created these immortal figures was content to subdue or to sacrifice all other and subordinate considerations. Coleridge, as no reader will probably need to be reminded, 'thought the Edipus Tyrannus, The Alchemist, and Tom Jones, the three most perfect plots ever planned.' With the warmest admiration and appreciation of Fielding's noble and immortal masterpiece, I cannot think it at all worthy of comparison, for blameless ingenuity of composition and absolute impeccability of design, with the greatest of tragic and the greatest of comic triumphs in

construction ever accomplished by the most consummate and the most conscientious among ancient and modern artists. And when we remember that this perfection of triumphant art is exhibited, not on the scale of an ordinary comedy, whether classic or romantic, comprising a few definite types and a few impressive situations, but on a scale of invention so vast and so various as to comprise in the course of a single play as many characters and as many incidents, all perfectly adjusted and naturally developed out of each other, as would amply suffice for the entire dramatic furniture, for the entire poetic equipment, of a great dramatic poet, we feel that Gifford's expression, a 'prodigy of human intellect,' is equally applicable to The Fox and to The Alchemist, and is not a whit too strong a term for either. Nor can I admit, as I cannot discern, the blemish or imperfection which others have alleged that they descry in the composition of Volpone—the unlikelihood of the device by which retribution is brought down in the fifth act on the criminals who were left at the close of the fourth act in impregnable security and triumph. So far from regarding the comic Nemesis or rather Ate which infatuates and impels Volpone to his doom as a sacrifice of art to morality, an immolation of probability and consistency on the

altar of poetic justice, I admire as a master-stroke of character the haughty audacity of caprice which produces or evolves his ruin out of his own hardihood and insolence of exulting and daring enjoyment. For there is something throughout of the lion as well as of the fox in this original and incomparable figure. I know not where to find a third instance of catastrophe comparable with that of either *The Fox* or *The Alchemist* in the whole range of the highest comedy; whether for completeness, for propriety, for interest, for ingenious felicity of event or for perfect combination and exposition of all the leading characters at once in supreme simplicity, unity, and fullness of culminating effect.

And only in the author's two great farces shall we find so vast a range and variety of characters. The foolish and famous couplet of doggrel rhyme which brackets *The Silent Woman* with *The Fox* and *The Alchemist* is liable to prejudice the reader against a work which if compared with those marvellous masterpieces must needs seem to lose its natural rights to notice, to forfeit its actual claim on our rational admiration. Its proper place is not with these, but beside its fellow example of exuberant, elaborate, and deliberately farcical

Farces 43

realism—Bartholomery Fair. And the two are not less wonderful in their own way, less triumphant on their own lines, than those two crowning examples of comedy. Farcical in construction and in action, they belong to the province of the higher form of art by virtue of their leading characters. Morose indeed, as a victimized monomaniac, is rather a figure of farce than of comedy: Captain Otter and his termagant are characters of comedy rather broad than high: but the collegiate ladies, in their matchless mixture of pretention and profligacy, hypocrisy and pedantry, recall rather the comedies than the farces of Molière by the elaborate and vivid precision of portraiture which presents them in such perfect finish, with such vigour and veracity of effect. Again, if Bartholomew Fair is mere farce in many of its minor characters and in some of its grosser episodes and details, the immortal figure of Rabbi Busy belongs to the highest order of comedy. In that absolute and complete incarnation of Puritanism full justice is done to the merits while full justice is done upon the demerits of the barbarian sect from whose inherited and infectious tyranny this nation is as yet but imperfectly delivered. Brother Zeal-of-the-Land is no vulgar impostor, no mere religious quacksalver of such a kind as supplies the common food for satire, the common fuel of ridicule: he is a hypocrite of the earnest kind, an Ironside among civilians; and the very abstinence of his creator from Hudibrastic misrepresentation and caricature makes the satire more thoroughly effective than all that Butler's exuberance of wit and prodigality of intellect could accomplish. The snuffling glutton who begins by exciting our laughter ends by displaying a comic perversity of stoicism in the stocks which is at least more respectable if not less laughable than the complacency of Justice Overdo, the fatuity of poor Cokes, the humble jocosity of a Littlewit, or the intemperate devotion of a Waspe. Hypocrisy streaked with sincerity, greed with across of earnestness and craft with a dash of fortitude, combine to make of the Rabbi at once the funniest, the fairest, and the faithfullest study ever taken of a less despicable than detestable type of fanatic.

Not only was the genius of Jonson too great, but his character was too radically noble for a realist or naturalist of the meaner sort. It is only in the minor parts of his gigantic work, only in its insignificant or superfluous components or details, that we find a tedious insistence on wearisome or offensive topics of inartistic satire or ineffectual

display. Nor is it upon the ignoble sides of character that this great satiric dramatist prefers to concentrate his attention. As even in the most terrible masterpieces of Balzac, it is not the wickedness of the vicious or criminal agents, it is their energy of intellect, their dauntless versatility of daring, their invincible fertility of resource, for which our interest is claimed or by which our admiration is aroused. In Face as in Subtle, in Volpone as in Mosca, the qualities which delight us are virtues misapplied: it is not their cunning, their avarice, or their lust, it is their courage, their genius, and their wit in which we take no ignoble or irrational pleasure. And indeed it would be strange and incongruous if a great satirist who was also a great poet had erred so grossly as not to aim at this result, or had fallen so grievously short of his aim as not to vindicate the dignity of his design. The same year in which the stage first echoed the majestic accents of Volpone's opening speech was distinguished by the appearance of the Masque of Blackness: a work eminent even among its author's in splendour of Masque of Blackness. fancy, invention, and flowing eloquence. Its companion or counterpart, the Masque Masque of of Beauty, a poem even more notable Beauty.

for these qualities than its precursor, did not appear till three years later. Its brilliant and picturesque variations on the previous theme afford a perfect example of poetic as distinct from prosaic ingenuity.

Between the dates of these two masques, which were first printed and published together, three other entertainments had employed the energetic genius of the Laureate on the double task of scenical invention and literary decoration. The first occasion was that famous visit of King Christian and his hard-drinking Danes which is patriotically supposed to have done so much harm to the proverbially sober and abstemious nation whose temperance is so vividly depicted by the enthusiastic cordiality of Iago. The Entertainment of Two Kings at Theobalds opens ment of Two well, with two vigorous and sonorous Kings at couplets of welcome: but the Latin verses are hardly worthy of Gifford's too fervid commendation. The mock marriage of the boyish Earl of Essex and the girl afterwards known to ill fame as Countess of Somerset gave occasion of which Jonson availed himself to the full for massive display of antiquarian magnificence and indefatigable prodigality of inexhaustible

detail. The epithalamium of these quasi-nuptials is fine—when it is not coarse (we cannot away, for instance, with the comparison, in serious poetry, of kisses to—cockles!): but the exuberant enthusiasm of Gifford for 'this chaste and beautiful gem' is liable to provoke in the reader's mind a comparison 'with the divine original': and among the very few poets who could sustain a comparison with Catullus no man capable of learning the merest rudiments of poetry will affirm that Ben Ionson can be ranked. His verses are smooth and strong, 'well-torned and true-filed': but the matchless magic, the impeccable inspiration, the grace, the music, the simple and spontaneous perfection of the Latin poem, he could pretend neither to rival nor to reproduce. 'What was my part,' says Jonson in a note, 'the faults here, as well as the virtues, must speak.' These are the concluding words of a most generous and cordial tribute to the merits of the mechanist or stage-carpenter, the musician. and the dancing-master-Inigo Jones, Alfonso Ferrabosco, and Thomas Giles-who were employed on the composition of this magnificent if ill-omened pageant: and they may very reasonably be applied to the two translations from Catullus which the poet-certainly no prophet on this

particular occasion—thought fit to introduce into the ceremonial verse of the masques held on the first and second nights of these star-crossed festivities. The faults and the virtues, the vigour of phrase and the accuracy of rendering, the stiffness of expression and the slowness of movement, are unmistakably characteristic of the workman. But in the second night's masque it must be noted that the original verse is distinctly better than the translated stanzas: the dispute of Truth and Opinion is a singularly spirited and vigorous example of amœbæan allegory. In the next year's

Entertainment of King Anne at Theobalds.

Entertainment of the king and queen at Theobalds, then ceded by its owner to the James and king, the happy simplicity of invention and arrangement is worthily seconded or supported by the grave and dignified music

of the elegiac verse which welcomes the coming and speeds the parting master. Next year The Masque of Beauty and the masque at Lord Haddington's marriage, each containing some of Jonson's finest and most flowing verse, bore equal witness to the energy and to the elasticity of his genius for apt and varied invention. The amœbæan stanzas in the later of these two masques have more freedom of movement and spontaneity of music than will perhaps be found in any other poem of equal length from the same indefatigable hand. The fourth of these stanzas is Masque at simply magnificent: the loveliness of the Lord Hadnext is impaired by that anatomical par- Marriage. ticularity which too often defaces the serious verse of Jonson with grotesque if not gross deformity of detail. No other poet, except possibly one of his spiritual sons, too surely 'sealed of the tribe of Ben,' would have introduced 'liver' and 'lights' into a sweet and graceful effusion of lyric fancy, good alike in form and sound; a commendation not always nor indeed very frequently deserved by the verse of its author. The variations in the burden of 'Hymen's war' are singularly delicate and happy.

The next was a memorable year in the literary life of Ben Jonson: it witnessed the appearance both of the magnificent Masque of Queens and of the famous comedy or Masque of farce of The Silent Woman. The marvellously vivid and dexterous application of marvellous learning and labour which distinguishes the most splendid of all masques as one of the typically splendid monuments or trophies of English literature has apparently eclipsed, in the

appreciation of the general student, that equally admirable fervour of commanding fancy which informs the whole design and gives life to every detail. The interlude of the witches is so royally lavish in its wealth and variety of fertile and lively horror that on a first reading the student may probably do less than justice to the lofty and temperate eloquence of the noble verse and the noble prose which follow.

Of The Silent Woman it is not easy to say anything new and true. Its merits are salient The Silent and superb: the combination of parts and the accumulation of incidents are so skilfully arranged and so powerfully designed that the result is in its own way incomparable -or comparable only with other works of the master's hand while yet in the fullness of its cunning and the freshness of its strength. But a play of this kind must inevitably challenge a comparison, in the judgment of modern readers, between its author and Molière: and Jonson can hardly, on the whole, sustain that most perilous comparison. It is true that there is matter enough in Jonson's play to have furnished forth two or three of Molière's: and that on that ground-on the score of industrious intelligence and laborious versatility of humour—The Silent Woman is as superior to the Misanthrope and the Bourgeois Gentilhomme as to Twelfth Night and Much Ado about Nothing. But even when most dazzled by the splendour of studied wit and the felicity of deliberate humour which may even yet explain the extraordinary popularity or reputation of this most imperial and elaborate of all farces, we feel that the author could no more have rivalled the author of Twelfth Night than he could have rivalled the author of Othello. The Nemesis of the satirist is upon him: he cannot be simply at ease: he cannot be happy in his work without some undertone of sarcasm, some afterthought of allusion, aimed at matters which Molière would have reserved for a slighter style of satire, and which Shakespeare would scarcely have condescended to recognise as possible objects of even momentary attention. His wit is wonderful-admirable, laughable, laudable-it is not in the fullest and the deepest sense delightful. It is radically cruel, contemptuous, intolerant; the sneer of the superior person-Dauphine or Clerimont—is always ready to pass into a snarl: there is something in this great classic writer of the bull-baiting or bear-baiting brutality of his age. We put down The Fox or The Alchemist

with a sense of wondering admiration, hardly affected by the impression of some occasional superfluity or excess: we lay aside The Silent Woman, not indeed without grateful recollection of much cordial enjoyment, but with distinct if reluctant conviction that the generous table at which we have been so prodigally entertained was more than a little crowded and overloaded with multifarious if savoury encumbrance of dishes. And if, as was Gifford's opinion, Shakespeare took a hint from the mock duellists in this comedy for the mock duellists in Twelfth Night, how wonderfully has he improved on his model! The broad rude humour of Jonson's practical joke is boyishly brutal in the horseplay of its violence: the sweet bright fun of Shakespeare's is in perfect keeping with the purer air of the sunnier climate it thrives in. The divine good-nature, the godlike good-humour of Shakespeare can never be quite perfectly appreciated till we compare his playfulness or his merriment with other men's. Even that of Aristophanes seems to smack of the barbarian beside it.

I cannot but fear that to thorough-going Jonsonians my remarks on the great comedy in which Dryden found the highest perfection of dramatic art on record may seem inadequate if

not inappreciative. But to do it anything like justice would take up more space than I can spare: it would indeed, like most of Jonson's other successful plays, demand a separate study of some length and elaboration. The high comedy of the collegiate ladies, the low comedy of Captain and Mrs. Otter, the braggart knights and the Latinist barber, are all as masterly as the versions of Ovid's elegiacs into prose dialogue are tedious in their ingenuity and profitless in their skill. As to the chief character—who must evidently have been a native of Ecclefechan-he is as superior to the malade imaginaire, or to any of the Sganarelles or Molière, as is Molière himself to Jonson in lightness of spontaneous movement and easy grace of inspiration. And this is perhaps the only play of Jonson's which will keep the reader or spectator for whole scenes together in an inward riot or an open passion of subdued or unrepressed laughter.

The speeches at Prince Henry's The Barriers, written by the Laureate for Speeches at Prince the occasion of the heir apparent's in-Henry's Barriers. vestiture as Prince of Wales, are noticeable for their fine and dexterous fusion of legend with history in eloquent and weighty verse. But the Masque of Oberon, presented the day before

the tournament in which the prince bore himself so gallantly as to excite 'the great wonder of the The beholders,' is memorable for a quality far Masque of higher than this: it is unsurpassed if not unequalled by any other work of its author for brightness and lightness and grace of fancy, for lyric movement and happy simplicity of expression.

Such work, however, was but the byplay in which the genius of this indefatigable poet found its natural relaxation during the year which gave to the world for all time a Alchemist. gift so munificent as that of The Alchemist. This 'unequalled play,' as it was called by contemporary admirers, was not miscalled by their enthusiasm; it is in some respects unparalleled among all the existing masterpieces of comedy. No student worthy of the name who may agree with me in preferring The Fox to The Alchemist will wish to enforce his preference upon others. Such perfection of plot, with such multiplicity of characters—such ingenuity of incident, with such harmony of construction—can be matched, we may surely venture to say, nowhere in the whole vast range of comic invention—nowhere in the whole wide world of dramatic fiction. If the interest is less poignant than in

Volpone, the fun less continuous than in The Silent Woman, the action less simple and spontaneous than that of Every Man in his Humour, the vein of comedy is even richer than in any of these other masterpieces. The great Sir Epicure is enough in himself to immortalize the glory of the great artist who conceived and achieved a design so fresh, so daring, so colossal in its humour as that of this magnificent character. And there are at least nine others in the play as perfect in drawing, as vivid in outline, as living in every limb and every feature, as even his whose poetic stature overtops them all. The deathless three confederates, Kastrill and Surly, Dapper and Drugger, the too perennial Puritans whose villainous whine of purity and hypocrisy has its living echoes even now-not a figure among them could have been carved or coloured by any other hand.

Nor is the list even yet complete of Jonson's poetic work during this truly wonderful year of his literary life. At Christmas he produced 'the Queen's Majesty's masque' of Love Love freed freed from Ignorance and Folly; a little from Ignorance and dramatic poem composed in his lightest Folly. and softest vein of fancy, brilliant and melodious throughout. The mighty and majestic Poet Lau-

reate would hardly, I fear, have accepted with benignity the tribute of a compliment to the effect that his use of the sweet and simple heptasyllabic metre was worthy of Richard Barnfield or George Wither: but it is certain that in purity and fluency of music his verse can seldom be compared, as here it justly may, with the clear flutelike notes of Cynthia and The Shepherd's Hunting. An absurd misprint in the last line but three has afflicted all Jonson's editors with unaccountable perplexity. 'Then, then, angry music sound,' sings the chorus at the close of a song in honour of 'gentle Love and Beauty.' It is inconceivable that no one should yet have discovered the obvious solution of so slight but unfortunate an error in the type as the substitution of 'angry' for 'airy.'

The tragedy of Catiline his Conspiracy gave evidence in the following year that the author of Sejanus could do better, but could not do much better, on the same rigid lines of rhetorical and studious work which he had followed in the earlier play. Fine as is the opening of this too laborious tragedy, the stately verse has less of dramatic movement than of such as might be proper—if such a thing could be—for epic satire cast into the form of dialogue. Catiline is so mere a monster

of ravenous malignity and irrational atrocity that he simply impresses us as an irresponsible though criminal lunatic: and there is something so preposterous, so abnormal, in the conduct and language of all concerned in his conspiracy, that nothing attributed to them seems either rationally credible or logically incredible. Coleridge, in his notes on the first act of this play, expresses his conviction that one passage must surely have fallen into the wrong place-such action at such a moment being impossible for any human creature. But the whole atmosphere is unreal, the whole action unnatural: no one thing said or done is less unlike the truth of life than any other: the writing is immeasurably better than the style of the ranting tragedian Seneca, but the treatment of character is hardly more serious as a study of humanity than his. In fact, what we find here is exactly what we find in the least successful of Jonson's comedies: a study, not of humanity, but of humours. The bloody humour of Cethegus, the braggart humour of Curius, the sluggish humour of Lentulus, the swaggering humour of Catiline himself—a huffcap hero as ever mouthed and strutted out his hour on the stage—all these alike fall under the famous definition of his favourite phrase which

the poet had given twelve years before in the induction to the second of his acknowledged comedies. And a tragedy of humours is hardly less than a monster in nature—or rather in that art which 'itself is nature.' Otherwise the second act must be pronounced excellent: the humours of the rival harlots, the masculine ambition of Sempronia, the caprices and cajoleries of Fulvia, are drawn with Jonson's most self-conscious care and skill. But the part of Cicero is burden enough to stifle any play: and some even of the finest passages, such as the much-praised description of the dying Catiline, fine though they be, are not good in the stricter sense of the word; the rhetorical sublimity of their diction comes most perilously near the verge of bombast. Altogether, the play is another magnificent mistake: and each time we open or close it we find it more difficult to believe that the additions made by its author some ten years before to The Spanish Tragedy can possibly have been those printed in the later issues of that famous play.1 Their subtle and

¹ No student will need to be reminded of what is apparently unknown to some writers who have thought fit to offer an opinion on this subject—that different additions were made at different dates, and by different hands, to certain popular plays of the time. The original Faustus of Marlowe was altered and re-altered, at least

spontaneous notes of nature, their profound and searching pathos, their strange and thrilling tone of reality, the beauty and the terror and the truth of every touch, are the signs of a great, a very great tragic poet: and it is all but unimaginable that such an one could have been, but a year or so afterwards, the author of *Sejanus*—and again, eight years later, the author of *Catiline*. There is fine occasional writing in each, but it is not dramatic: and there is good dramatic work in each, but it is not tragic.

For two years after the appearance of *Catiline* there is an interval of silence and inaction in the literary life of its author; an intermission of labour which we cannot pretend to explain in the case of this Herculean workman, who seems usually to have taken an austere and strenuous delight in the employment and exhibition of his colossal energies. His next work is one of which it seems all but impossible for criticism to speak with neither more nor less than justice. Gifford himself, the most devoted of editors and of partisans, to

three times, by three if not more purveyors of interpolated and incongruous matter: and even that superb masterpiece would hardly seem to have rivalled the popularity of Kyd's tragedy—a popularity by no means unmerited.

whom all serious students of Jonson owe a tribute of gratitude and respect, seems to have wavered in his judgment on this point to a quite unaccountable degree. In his memoirs of Ben Jonson Bartholomew Fair is described as 'a popular piece, but chiefly remarkable for mew Fair. the obloquy to which it has given birth.' In his final note on the play, he expresses an opinion that it has 'not unjustly' been considered as 'nearly on a level with those exquisite dramas, The Fox and The Alchemist.' Who shall decide when not only do doctors disagree, but the most self-confident of doctors in criticism disagrees with himself to so singular an extent? The dainty palate of Leigh Hunt was naturally nauseated by the undoubtedly greasy flavour of the dramatic viands here served up in such prodigality of profusion: and it must be confessed that some of the meat is too high and some of the sauces are too rank for any but a very strong digestion. But those who turn away from the table in sheer disgust at the coarseness of the fare will lose the enjoyment of some of the richest and strongest humour, some of the most brilliant and varied realism, that ever claimed the attention or excited he admiration of the study or the stage. That 'superlunatical hypocrite,' the immortal and only too immortal Rabbi Busy, towers above the minor characters of the play as the execrable fanaticism which he typifies and embodies was destined to tower above reason and humanity, charity and common sense, in its future influence on the social life of England. But in sheer force and fidelity of presentation this wonderful study from nature can hardly be said to exceed the others which surround and set it off; the dotard Littlewit, the booby Cokes, the petulant fidelity and pig-headed self-confidence of Waspe, the various humours and more various villainies of the multitudinous and riotous subordinates; above all, that enterprising and intelligent champion of social purity, the conscientious and clear-sighted Justice Adam Overdo. When all is said that can reasonably be said against the too accurate reproduction and the too voluminous exposition of vulgar and vicious nature in this enormous and multitudinous pageant-too serious in its satire and too various in its movement for a farce, too farcical in its incidents and too violent in its horseplay for a comedy—the delightful humour of its finer scenes, the wonderful vigour and veracity of the whole, the unsurpassed ingenuity and dexterity of the composition, the energy, harmony, and versatility of the action, must be admitted to ensure its place for ever among the minor and coarser masterpieces of comic art.

The masque of Love Restored, to which no date is assigned by the author or his editors, has some noticeable qualities in common with the play which has just been considered, and ought perhaps to have taken precedence of it in our descriptive catalogue. Robin Goodfellow's adventures at court are described with such realistic as well as fantastic humour that his narrative might have made part of the incidents or episodes of the Fair without any impropriety or incongruity; but the lyric fancy and the spirited allegory which enliven this delightful little miniature of a play make it more heartily and more simply enjoyable than many or indeed than most of its author's works. Three other masques were certainly produced during the course of the year 1614. A Challenge at Tilt at a Marriage, which was produced eight Challenge at Tilt at a years after the Masque of Hymen, opened Marriage. the new year with a superb display in honour of the second nuptials of the lady whose previous marriage, now cancelled as a nullity,

had been acclaimed by the poet with such superfluous munificence of congratulation and of augury as might have made him hesitate, or at least might make us wish that he had seen fit to hesitate, before undertaking the celebration of the bride's remarriage—even had it not been made infamously memorable by association with matters less familiar to England at any time than to Rome under Pope Alexander VI. or to Paris under Oueen Catherine de' Medici. But from the literary point of view, as distinguished from the ethical or the historical, we have less reason to regret than to rejoice in so graceful an example of the poet's abilities as a writer of bright, facile, ingenious and exquisite prose. The Irish Masque, The Irish presented four days later, may doubtless Masque. have been written with no sarcastic intention; but if there was really no such under-current of suggestion or intimation designed or imagined by the writer, we can only find a still keener savour of satire, a still clearer indication of insight, in the characteristic representation of a province whose typical champions fall to wrangling and exchange of reciprocal insults over the display of their ruffianly devotion: while there is not merely a tone of official rebuke or courtly compliment, but a note of genuine good feeling and serious good sense, in the fine solid blank verse delivered by 'a civil gentleman of the nation.'

On Twelfth Night the comic masque of Mercury Vindicated Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists from the Alche
Alche.

mists. had not exhausted his arsenal of ridicule, but had yet some shafts of satire left for the professors of Subtle's art or mystery. The humour here is somewhat elaborate, though unquestionably spirited and ingenious.

The next year's is again a blank record; but the year 1616, though to us more mournfully memorable for the timeless death of Shakespeare, is also for the student of Ben Jonson a date of exceptional importance and interest. The production of two masques and a comedy in verse, with the publication of the magnificent first edition of his collected plays and poems, must have kept his name more continuously if not more vividly before the world than in any preceding year of his literary life. The masque of The Golden The Golden Age Restored, presented on New Year's Age Night and again on Twelfth Night, is equally ingenious and equally spirited in its happy simplicity of construction and in the vigorous fluency of its versification; which is generally smooth, and in the lyrical dialogue from after the first dance to the close may fairly be called sweet; an epithet very seldom applicable to the solid and polished verse of Jonson. And if The Devil is an Ass cannot be ranked among the crowning masterpieces of its author, it is not The Devil because the play shows any sign of is an Ass. decadence in literary power or in humorous invention: the writing is admirable, the wealth of comic matter is only too copious, the characters are as firm in outline and as rich in colour as any but the most triumphant examples of his satirical or sympathetic skill in finished delineation and demarcation of humours. On the other hand, it is of all Ben Jonson's comedies since the date of Cynthia's Revels the most obsolete in subject of satire, the most temporary in its allusions and applications: the want of fusion or even connection (except of the most mechanical or casual kind) between the various parts of its structure and the alternate topics of its ridicule makes the action more difficult to follow than that of many more complicated plots: and, finally, the admixture of serious sentiment and noble emotion is not so

skilfully managed as to evade the imputation of incongruity. Nevertheless, there are touches in the dialogue between Lady Tailbush and Lady Fitherside in the first scene of the fourth act which are worthy of Molière himself, and suggestive of the method and the genius to which we owe the immortal enjoyment derived from the society of Cathos and Madelon-I should say, Polixène and Aminte, of Célimène and Arsinoé, and of Philaminte and Bélise. The third scene of the same act is so nobly written that the reader may feel half inclined to condone or to forget the previous humiliation of the too compliant heroine—her servile and undignified submission to the infamous imbecility of her husband-in admiration of the noble and natural eloquence with which the poet has here endowed her. But this husband, comical as are the scenes in which he develops and dilates from the part of a dupe to the part of an impostor. is a figure almost too loathsome to be ludicrous or at least, however ludicrous, to be fit for the leading part in a comedy of ethics as well as of And the prodigality of elaboration lavished on such a multitude of subordinate characters, at the expense of all continuous interest and to the sacrifice of all dramatic harmony, may

tempt the reader to apostrophize the poet in his own words:—

You are so covetous still to embrace More than you can, that you lose all.

Yet a word of parting praise must be given to Satan: a small part as far as extent goes, but a splendid example of high comic imagination after the order of Aristophanes, admirably relieved by the low comedy of the asinine Pug and the voluble doggrel of the antiquated Vice.

Not till nine years after the appearance of this play, in which the genius of the author may be said—in familiar phraseology—to have fallen between two stools, carrying either too much suggestion of human interest for a half allegorical satire, or not enough to give actual interest to the process of the satirical allegory, did Ben Jonson produce on the stage a masterpiece of comedy in which this danger was avoided, this difficulty overcome, with absolute and triumphant facility of execution. In the meantime, however, he had produced nine masques-or ten, counting that which appeared in the same year with his last great work of comic art. The Masque Masque of of Christmas, which belongs to the same year as the two works last mentioned, is a comfortable little piece of genial comic realism; pleasant, quaint, and homely: the good-humoured humour of little Robin Cupid and his honest old mother 'Venus, a deaf tirewoman,' is more agreeable than many more studious and elaborate examples of the author's fidelity as a painter or photographer of humble life. Next year, in the masque of Lovers made Men, called by made Men. Gifford The Masque of Lethe, he gave full play to his lighter genius and lyric humour: it is a work of exceptionally simple, natural, and graceful fancy. In the following year he brought The Vision out the much-admired Vision of Delight; of Delight. a very fair example of his capacities and incapacities. The fanciful, smooth, and flowing verse of its graver parts would be worthy of Fletcher, were it not that the music is less fresh and pure in melody, and that among the finest and sweetest passages there are interspersed such lamentably flat and stiff couplets as would have been impossible to any other poet of equal rank. If justice has not been done in modern times to Ben Jonson as one of the greatest of dramatists and humourists, much more than justice has been done to him as a lyric poet. The famous song of Night in this masque opens and closes most beautifully and

most sweetly: but two out of the eleven lines which compose it, the fifth and the sixth, are positively and intolerably bad. The barbarous and pedantic license of inversion which disfigures his best lyrics with such verses as these—'Create of airy forms a stream,' 'But might I of Jove's nectar sup'—is not a fault of the age but a vice of the poet. Marlowe and Lyly, Shakespeare and Webster, Fletcher and Dekker, could write songs as free from this blemish as Tennyson's or Shelley's. There is no surer test of the born lyric poet than the presence or absence of an instinctive sense which assures him when and how and where to use or to abstain from inversion. And in Jonson it was utterly wanting.

The next year's masque, Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue, would be very graceful in composition if it were not rather awkward in construction.

The verses in praise of dancing are very Reconciled to Virtue.

pretty, sedate, and polished: and the burlesque part (spoken by 'Messer Gaster' in person) has more than usual of Rabelaisian freedom and energy. The antimasque afterwards prefixed to it, For the Honour of Wales, is somewhat ponderous in its jocularity, but has genuine Honour of Wales.

The tree Honour of Wales are in the Honour of Wales.

Honour of Wales and brief' display of the

poet's incomparable industry and devotion to the study of dialects and details: and the close is noble and simple in its patriotic or provincial eloquence. But in the year 1620 the comic genius of Jonson shone out once more in all the splendour

News from the New World discovered in the Moon. of its strength. The only masque of that year, News from the New World discovered in the Moon, is worthy of a prose Aristophanes: in other words, it is a satire

such as Aristophanes might have written, if that greater poet had ever condescended to write prose. Here for once the generous words of Jonson's noble panegyric on Shakespeare may justly be applied to himself: in his own immortal phrase, the humour of this little comedy is 'not of an age, but for all time.' At the very opening we find ourselves on but too familiar ground, and feel that the poet must have shot himself forward by sheer inspiration into our own enlightened age, when we hear 'a printer of news' avowing the notable fact that 'I do hearken after them, wherever they be, at any rates; I'll give anything for a good copy now, be it true or false, so it be news.' Are not these, the reader must ask himself, the accents of some gutter gaolbird—some dunghill gazetteer of this very present day? Or is the avowal too honest in its impudence for such

lips as these? After this, the anticipation of something like railways ('coaches' that 'go only with wind')-if not also of something like balloon-('a castle in the air that runs upon wheels, with a winged lanthorn')—seems but a commonplace example of prophetic instinct.

The longest of Ben Jonson's masques was expanded to its present bulk by the additions made at each successive representation before the king; to whose not over delicate or fastidious taste this

Masque of the Metamorphosed Gipsies would seem to have given incomparable if of the not inexhaustible delight. And even those readers who may least enjoy the decidedly

A Masgr. Metamo. phosed Gipsies.

greasy wit or humour of some among its once most popular lyrical parts must admire and cannot bur enjoy the rare and even refined loveliness of others. The fortune most unfortunately told of his future life and death to the future King Charles I. is told in the very best lyric verse that the poet could command: a strain of quite exceptional sweetness. simplicity, and purity of music: to which, as we read it now, the record of history seems to play a most tragically ironical accompaniment, in a minor key of subdued and sardonic presage. And besides these graver and lovelier interludes of poetry which relieve the somewhat obtrusive realism of the broader comic parts, this masque has other claims on our notice and remembrance; the ingenuity and dexterity, the richness of resource and the pliability of humour, which inform and animate all its lyric prophecies or compliments.

The masque which appeared in the following year is a monument of learning and labour such as no other poet could have dreamed of Masque of lavishing on a ceremonial or official piece of work, and which can only be appreciated by careful reading and thorough study of the copious notes and references appended to the text. But the writer's fancy was at a low ebb when it could devise nothing better than is to be found in this Masque of Augurs: the humour is coarse and clumsy, the verses are flat and stiff. In the next year's Twelfth-Night masque, Time vindicated to himself and to his honours, the vigorous Time vinand vicious personalities of the attack on dicated to

dicated to himself and vicious personalities of the attack on himself and to his George Wither give some life to the part honours. in which the author of Abuses Stript and Whipt is brought in under the name of Chronomastix to make mirth for the groundlings of the Court. The feeble and facile fluency of his pedestrian Muse in the least fortunate hours of her

too voluble and voluminous improvisation is not unfairly caricatured; but the Laureate's malevolence is something too obvious in his ridicule of the 'soft ambling verse' whose 'rapture' at its highest has the quality denied by nature to Jonson's-the divine gift of melodious and passionate simplicity. A better and happier use for his yet unimpaired faculty of humour was found in the following year's masque of Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion; which contains the most famous and eloquent panegyric on the art of cookery that ever anticipated the ardours of Thackeray and the enthusiasm of Dumas. The passage is a really superb example of Triumph tragicomic or mock-heroic blank verse; turn of and in the closing lyrics of the masque there is no lack of graceful fancy and harmonious elegance. For the next year's masque of Pan's Anniversary, or The Shepherd's Holiday, not guite so much can reasonably be said. It is a typical and a flagrant instance of the poet's proverbial and incurable tendency to overdo Annieverything: there is but artificial smoothness in the verse, and but clownish ingenuity in the prose of it.

But the year 1625 is memorable to the students

and admirers of Ben Jonson for the appearance of a work worth almost all his masques together; a work in which the author of The Fox and The Alchemist once more reasserted his claim to a seat which no other poet and no other dramatist could dispute. The last complete and finished masterpiece of his genius is the splendid comedy of The Stable The Staple of News. This, rather than of Nervs. The Silent Woman, is the play which should be considered as the third—or perhaps we should say the fourth-of the crowning works which represent the consummate and incomparable powers of its author. No man can know anything worth knowing of Ben Jonson who has not studied and digested the text of *livery Man in his Humour*, The Fox, The Alchemist, and The Staple of News: but any man who has may be said to know him well. To a cursory or an incompetent reader it may appear at first sight that the damning fault of The Devil is an Ass is also the fault of this later comedy: that we have here again an infelicitous and an incongruous combination of realistic satire with Aristophanic allegory, and that the harmony of the different parts, the unity of the composite action, which a pupil of Aristophanes should at east have striven to attain-or, if he could not, at

least to imitate and to respect—can here be considered as conspicuous only by their absence. But no careful and candid critic will retain such an impression after due study has been given to the third poetic comedy which reveals to us the genius of Jonson, not merely as a realistic artist in prose or a master of magnificent farce, but as a great comic poet. The scheme of his last preceding comedy had been vitiated by a want of coherence between the actual and the allegorical, the fantastic and the literal point of view; and the result was confusion without fusion of parts: here, on the other hand, we have fusion without confusion between the dramatic allegory suggested by Aristophanes, the admirably fresh and living presentation of the three Pennyboys, and the prophetic satire of the newsmarket or Stock Exchange of journalism. The competent reader will be divided between surprise at the possibility and delight in the perfection of the success achieved by a poet who has actually endowed with sufficiency of comic life and humorous reality a whole group of symbolic personifications; from the magnificent Infanta herself, Aurelia Clara Pecunia, most gracious and generous yet most sensitive and discreet of imperial amsels, even down to little 'blushet' Rose Wax

the chambermaid. Her young suitor is at least as good a picture of a generous light-headed prodigal as ever was shown on any stage: as much of a man as Charles Surface, and very much more of a gentleman. The miserly uncle, though very well drawn, is less exceptionally well drawn: but Pennyboy Canter, the disguised father, is equally delightful from the moment of his entrance with an extempore carol of salutation on his lips to those in which he appears to rescue the misused Infanta from the neglectful favourite of her choice, and reappears at the close of the play to rescue his son, redeem his brother, and scatter the community of jeerers: to whose humour Gifford is somewhat less than just when he compares it with 'the vapouring in Bartholomew Fair': for it is neither coarse nor tedious, and takes up but very little space; and that not unamusingly. As for the great scene of the Staple, it is one of the most masterly in ancient or modern comedy of the typical or satirical kind. The central 'Office' here opened, to the great offence (it should seem) of 'most of the spectators'—a fact which, as Gifford justly remarks, 'argues very little for the good sense of the audience,'-may be regarded by a modern student as representing the narrow little

nest in which was laid the modest little egg of modern journalism-that bird of many notes and many feathers, now so like an eagle and now so like a vulture: now soaring as a falcon or sailing as a pigeon over continents and battle-fields, now grovelling and groping as a dunghill kite, with its beak in a very middenstead of falsehood and of filth. The vast range of Ben Jonson's interest and observation is here as manifest as the wide scope and infinite variety of his humour. Science and warfare, Spinola and Galileo, come alike within reach of its notice, and serve alike for the material of its merriment. The invention of torpedos is anticipated by two centuries and a half; while in the assiduity of the newsmongers who traffic in eavesdropping detail we acknowledge a resemblance to that estimable race of tradesmen known to Parisian accuracy as interwieveurs. And the lunacy . of apocalyptic interpreters or prophets is gibbeted side by side with the fanatical ignorance of missionary enthusiasm, with impostures of professional quackery and speculations in personal libel. Certainly, if ever Ben deserved the prophetic title of Vates, it was in this last magnificent work of his maturest genius. Never had his style or his verse been riper or richer, more vigorous or more

pure. And even the interludes in which we hear the commentary and gather the verdict of 'these ridiculous gossips' (as their creator calls them) 'who tattle between the acts' are incomparably superior to his earlier efforts or excursions in the same field of humorous invention. The intrusive commentators on Every Man out of his Humour, for instance, are mere nullities—the awkward and abortive issue of unconscious uneasiness and inartistic egoism. But Expectation, Mirth, Tattle, and Censure, are genuine and living sketches of natural and amusing figures: and their dialogues, for appropriate and spirited simplicity, are worthy of comparison with even those of a similar nature which we owe not more to the genius than to the assailants of Molière.

In 1625 Ben Jonson had brought out his last great comedy: in 1626 he brought out the last of his finer sort of masques. Masque of little so-called Masque of Owls, which precedes it in the table of contents, is The (as Gifford points out) no masque at all: L'ortunate Isles, and it is a quaint effusion of doggrel dashed Union. with wit and streaked with satire. But in The Fortunate Isles, and their Union, the humour and the verse are alike excellent: the jest on

Plato's ideas would have delighted Landor, and the wish of Merefool to 'see a Brahman or a Gymnosophist' is worthy of a modern believer in esoteric Buddhism. Few if any of the masques have in them lyrics of smoother and clearer flow; and the construction is no less graceful than ingenious. The next reappearance of the poet, after a silence during three years of broken or breaking health, was so memorably unfortunate in its issue that the name and the fate of a play which was only too naturally and deservedly hooted off the stage are probably familiar to many who know nothing of the masterpiece which had last preceded it. Ever since Lamb gathered some excerpts from the more high-toned and elaborate passages The New of The New Inn, or The Light Heart, Inn. and commended in them 'the poetical fancy and elegance of mind of the supposed rugged old bard,' it has been the fashion to do justice if not something more than justice to the literary qualities of this play; which no doubt contains much vigorous and some graceful writing, and may now and then amuse a tolerant reader by its accumulating and culminating absurdities of action and catastrophe, character and event. But that the work shows portentous signs of mental decay, or at all events

of temporary collapse in judgment and in sense, can be questioned by no sane reader of so much as the argument. To rank any preceding play of Jonson's among those dismissed by Dryden as his 'dotages' would be to attribute to Dryden a verdict displaying the veriest imbecility of impudence: but to *The New Inn* that rough and somewhat brutal phrase is on the whole but too plausibly applicable.

At the beginning of the next year Jonson came forward in his official capacity as court poet or laureate, and produced 'the Queen's Love's Triumph Masque,' Love's Triumph through Callithrough Callipolis. polis, and again, at Shrovetide, 'the King's Masque, Chloridia. A few good verses, faint echoes of a former song, redeem the first of these from the condemnation of compassion or contempt; and there is still some evidence in its composition of conscientious energy and of capacity not yet reduced from the stage of decadence to the stage of collapse But the hymn which begins fairly enough with imitation of an earlier and nobler strain of verse at once subsides into commonplace, and closes in doggrel which would have disgraced a Sylvester or a Quarles. It is impossible to read Chloridia without a regretful reflection on the lapse of time which prevented it from being a

beautiful and typical instance of the author's lyric-power: but, however inferior it may be to what he would have made of so beautiful a subject in the freshness and fullness of his inventive and fanciful genius, it is still ingenious and effective after a fashion; and the first song is so genuinely graceful and simple as to remind us of Wordsworth in his more pedestrian but not uninspired moods or measures of lyrical or elegiac verse.

The higher genius of Ben Jonson as a comic poet was yet once more to show itself in one brilliant flash of parting splendour before its approaching sunset. No other of his works would seem to have met with such all but universal neglect as The Magnetic Lady; I do Magnetic not remember to have ever seen it quoted or referred to, except once by Dryden, who in his Essay of Dramatic Poesy cites from it an example of narrative substituted for action, 'where one comes out from dinner, and relates the quarrels and disorders of it, to save the undecent appearance of them on the stage, and to abbreviate the story.' And yet any competent spectator of its opening scenes must have felt a keen satisfaction at the apparent revival of the comic power and renewal of the dramatic instinct so lamentably enfeebled

and eclipsed on the last occasion of a new play from the same hand. The first act is full of brilliant satirical description and humorous analysis of humours: the commentator Compass, to whom we owe these masterly summaries of character, is an excellent counterpart of that 'reasonable man' who so constantly reappears on the stage of Molière to correct with his ridicule or control by his influence the extravagant or erratic tendencies of his associates. Very few examples of Jonson's grave and deliberate humour are finer than the ironical counsel given by Compass to the courtly fop whom he dissuades from challenging the soldier who has insulted him, on the ground that the soldier

has killed so many
As it is ten to one his turn is next:
You never fought with any, less, slew any;
And therefore have the [fairer] hopes before you,

The rest of the speech, with all that follows to the close of the scene, is no less ripe and rich in sedate and ingenious irony. There is no less admirable humour in the previous discourse of the usurer in praise of wealth—especially as being the only real test of a man's character:—

For, be he rich, he straight with evidence knows Whether he have any compassion

Or inclination unto virtue, or no: Where the poor knave erroneously believes If he were rich he would build churches, or Do such mad things.

Most of the characters are naturally and vigorously drawn in outline or in profile: Dame Polish is a figure well worthy the cordial and lavish commendation of Gifford: and the action is not only original and ingenious, but during the first four acts at any rate harmonious and amusing. The fifth act seems to me somewhat weaker; but the interludes are full of spirit, good humour, and good sense.

A Tale of a Tub, which appeared in the following year, is a singular sample of farce elaborated and exalted into comedy. This rustic A Tale of study, though 'not liked' by the king a Tub. and queen when acted before them at court, has very real merits in a homely way. The list of characters looks unpromising, and reminds us to regret that the old poet could not be induced to profit by Feltham's very just and reasonable animadversions on 'all your jests so nominal'; which deface this play no less than The New Inn, and repel the most tolerant reader by their formal and laborious puerility. But the action opens brightly and briskly: the dispute about 'Zin Valentine' is only less good in its way than one

of George Eliot's exquisite minor touches-Mr. Dempster's derivation of the word Presbyterian from one Jack Presbyter of historic infamy: the young squire's careful and testy 'man and governor' is no unworthy younger brother of Numps in Bartholomew Fair: and the rustic heroine, a figure sketched with rough realistic humour, is hardly less than delightful when she remarks, after witnessing the arrest of her intended bridegroom on a charge of highway robbery, 'He might have married one first, and have been hanged after, if he had had a mind to 't;' a reflection worthy of Congreve or Vanbrugh, Miss Hoyden or Miss Prue. But Jonson had never laid to heart the wisdom expressed in the admirable proverb-'Qui trop embrasse mal étreint'; the simple subject of the play and the homely motive of the action are overlaid and overloaded by the multiplicity of minor characters and episodical superfluities, and the upshot of all the poet's really ingenious contrivances is pointless as well as farcical and flat as well as trivial. But there is certainly no sign of dotage in any work of Ben Jonson's produced before or after the lamentable date of The New Inn. The author apologizes for the homely and rustic quality of his uncourtly play; but if it be a failure, it is not on account of its plebeian humility, but through the writer's want of any real sympathy with his characters, any hearty relish of his subject: because throughout the whole conduct of a complicated intrigue he shows himself ungenially observant and contemptuously studious of his models: because the qualities most needed for such work, transparent lucidity and straightforward simplicity of exposition, are not to be found in these last comedies: because, for instance, as much attention is needed to appreciate the ingenious process of 'humours reconciled' in The Magnetic Lady, or to follow the no less ingenious evolution of boorish rivalries and clownish intrigues in the play just noticed, as to follow the action and appreciate the design of The Fox or The Alchemist.

The masque of this year, Love's Welcome at Welbeck, is a thing of very slight pretentions, but not unsuccessful or undiverting after the its homely fashion. In the next year's welcome at Welbeck, companion masque, Love's Welcome at Welbeck, Love's Welcome at Bolsover, the verse, though not wanting in grace or ease, is less remarkable than the rough personal satire on Inigo Jones; who, it may

be observed, is as ready with a quotation from Chaucer as Goody Polish in *The Magnetic Lady* or Lovel in *The New Inn*.

Of this great dramatist's other than dramatic work in poetry or in prose this is not the place to speak: and his two posthumous fragments of dramatic poetry, interesting and characteristic as they are, can hardly affect for the better or for the worse our estimate of his powers. Had Mortimer his Fall been completed, we Mortimer his Fall. should undoubtedly have had a third example of rhetorical drama, careful, conscientious, energetic, impassive and impressive; worthy to stand beside the author's two Roman tragedies: and Mortimer might have confronted and outfaced Sejanus and Catiline in sonorous audacity of rhythmic selfassertion and triumphant ostentation of magnificent vacuity. In The Sad Shepherd we find the Shepherd. faults and the merits of his best and his worst masques so blended and confounded that we cannot but perceive the injurious effect on the Laureate's genius or instinct of intelligence produced by the habit of conventional invention which the writing of verse to order and the arrangement of effects for a pageant had now made inevitable and incurable. A masque including an antimasque, in which the serious part is relieved and set off by the introduction of parody or burlesque, was a form of art or artificial fashion in which incongruity was a merit; the grosser the burlesque, the broader the parody, the greater was the success and the more effective was the result: but in a dramatic attempt of higher pretention than such as might be looked for in the literary groundwork or raw material for a pageant, this intrusion of incongruous contrast is a pure barbarism—a positive solecism in composition. The collocation of such names and such figures as those of Æglamour and Earine with such others as Much and Maudlin, Scathlock and Scarlet, is no whit less preposterous or less ridiculous, less inartistic or less irritating, than the conjunction in Dekker's Satiromastix of Peter Flash and Sir Quintilian, Sir Adam Prickshaft and Sir Vaughan ap Rees, with Crispinus and Demetrius, Asinius and Horace: and the offence is graver, more inexcusable and more inexplicable, in a work of pure fancy or imagination, than in a work of poetic invention crossed and chequered with controversial satire. Yet Gifford, who can hardly find words or occasions sufficient to express his sense of Dekker's 'inconceivable folly,' or his

contempt for 'a plot that can scarcely be equalled in absurdity by the worst of the plays which Dekker was ever employed to "dress," has not a syllable of reprehension for the portentous incongruities of this mature and elaborate poem. On the other hand, even Gifford's editorial enthusiasm could not overestimate the ingenious excellence of construction, the masterly harmony of composition, which every reader of the argument must have observed with such admiration as can but intensify his regret that scarcely half of the projected poem has come down to us. No work of Ben Jonson's is more amusing and agreeable to read, as none is more nobly graceful in expression or more excellent in simplicity of style.

The immense influence of this great writer on his own generation is not more evident or more memorable than is the refraction or reverberation of that influence on the next. This 'sovereign sway and masterdom,' this overpowering preponderance of reputation, could not but be and could not but pass away. No giant had ever the divine versatility of a Shakespeare: but of all the giant brood none ever showed so much diversity of power as Jonson. In no single work has he displayed such masterly variety of style as has Byron

in his two great poems, Don Juan and The Vision of Judgment: the results of his attempts at mixture or fusion of poetry with farce will stand exposed in all their deformity and discrepancy if we set them beside the triumphant results of Shakespeare's. That faultless felicity of divine caprice which harmonizes into such absolute congruity all the outwardly incompatible elements of such works as Twelfth Night and The Tempest, the Winter's Tale and A Midsummer Night's Dream, is perhaps of all Shakespeare's incomparable gifts the one most utterly beyond reach of other poets. But when we consider the various faculties and powers of Jonson's genius and intelligence, when we examine severally the divers forces and capacities enjoyed and exercised by this giant workman in the performance of his work, we are amazed into admiration only less in its degree than we feel for the greatest among poets. It is not admiration of the same kind: there is less in it of love and worship than we give to the gods of song; but it is with deep reverence and with glowing gratitude that we salute in this Titan of the English stage 'il maestro di color che sanno.'



II MISCELLANEOUS WORKS



MISCELLANEOUS WORKS

AMONG the great dramatic poets of the Shake spearean age there are several who would still have a claim to enduring remembrance as poets. even had they never written a line for the theatre: there are two only who would hold a high rank among the masters of English prose. For Nash was not a poet or a dramatist who wandered occasionally into prose by way of change or diversion: he was a master of prose who straved now and then into lyric or dramatic verse. Hevwood, Middleton, and Ford have left us more or less curious and valuable works in prose; essays and pamphlets or chronicles and compilations: but these are works of historic interest rather than literary merit; or, if this be too strong and sweeping an expression, they are works of less intrinsic than empirical value. But if all his plays were lost to us, the author of Ben Jonson's

Explorata, or Discoveries, would yet retain a seat among English prose-writers beside the author of Bacon's Essays: the author of The Gull's Horn-book and The Bachelor's Banquet would still stand high in the foremost rank of English humourists.

The book of epigrams published by Jonson in the collected edition of his select works up to the date of the year 1616 is by no means an attractive introduction or an alluring prelude to the voluminous collection of miscellanies which in all modern editions it precedes. 'It is to be lamented,' in Gifford's opinion, 'on many accounts,' that the author has not left us 'a further selection.' It is in my opinion to be deplored that he should have left us so large a selection—if that be the proper term—as he has seen fit to bequeath to a naturally and happily limited set of readers. 'Sunt bona, sunt quædam mediocria, sunt mala plura': and the worst are so bad, so foul if not so dull, so stupid if not so filthy, that the student stands aghast with astonishment at the self-deceiving capacity of a writer who could prefix to such a collection the vaunt that his book was 'not covetous of least self-fame'-'much less' prone to indulgence in 'beastly phrase.' No man can ever have been less

amenable than Sir Walter Scott to the infamous charge of Puritanism or prudery; and it is he who has left on record his opinion that 'surely that coarseness of taste which tainted Ben Jonson's powerful mind is proved from his writings. Many authors of that age are indecent, but Jonson is filthy and gross in his pleasantry, and indulges himself in using the language of scavengers and nightmen.' I will only add that the evidence of this is flagrant in certain pages which I never forced myself to read through till I had undertaken to give a full and fair account—to the best of my ability-of Ben Jonson's complete works. How far poetry may be permitted to go in the line of sensual pleasure or sexual emotion may be debatable between the disciples of Ariosto and the disciples of Milton; but all English readers, I trust, will agree with me that coprology should be left to Frenchmen. Among them—that is, of course, among the baser sort of them-that unsavoury science will seemingly never lack disciples of the most nauseous, the most abject, the most deliberate bestiality. It is nothing less than lamentable that so great an English writer as Ben Jonson should ever have taken the plunge of a Parisian diver into the cesspool: but it is as

necessary to register as it is natural to deplore the detestable fact that he did so. The collection of his epigrams which bears only too noisome witness to this fact is nevertheless by no means devoid of valuable and admirable components. The sixty-fifth, a palinode or recantation of some previous panegyric, is very spirited and vigorous; and the verses of panegyric which precede and follow it are wanting neither in force nor in point. The poem 'on Lucy Countess of Bedford,' for which Gifford seems hardly able to find words adequate to his admiration, would be worthy of very high praise if the texture of its expression and versification were unstiffened and undisfigured by the clumsy license of awkward inversions. The New Cry, a brief and brilliant satire on political gossips of the gobemouche order, has one couplet worthy of Dryden himself, descriptive of such pretenders to statecraft as

> talk reserved, locked up, and full of fear, Nay, ask you how the day goes, in your ear; Keep a Star-chamber sentence close twelve days, And whisper what a Proclamation says.

The epitaph on little Salathiel Pavy, who had acted under his own name in the induction to Cynthia's Revels, is as deservedly famous as any

minor work of Jonson's; for sweetness and simplicity it has few if any equals among his lyrical attempts.

Of the fifteen lyric or elegiac poems which compose The Forest, there is none that is not worthy of all but the highest praise; The there is none that is worthy of the highest. Forest. To come so near so often and yet never to touch the goal of lyric triumph has never been the fortune and the misfortune of any other poet. Vigour of thought, purity of phrase, condensed and polished rhetoric, refined and appropriate eloquence, studious and serious felicity of expression. finished and fortunate elaboration of verse, might have been considered as qualities sufficient to secure a triumph for the poet in whose work all these excellent attributes are united and displayed; and we cannot wonder that younger men who had come within the circle of his personal influence should have thought that the combination of them all must ensure to their possessor a place above all his possible compeers. But among the humblest and most devout of these prostrate enthusiasts was one who had but to lay an idle and reckless hand on the instrument which hardly would answer the touch of his master's at all, and the very note of lyric poetry as it should be—as it was in the beginning, as it is, and as it will be for ever—responded on the instant to the instinctive intelligence of his touch. As we turn from Gray to Collins, as we turn from Wordsworth to Coleridge, as we turn from Byron to Shelley, so do we turn from Jonson to Herrick; and so do we recognize the lyric poet as distinguished from the writer who may or may not have every gift but one in higher development of excellence and in fuller perfection of power, but who is utterly and absolutely transcended and shone down by his probably unconscious competitor on the proper and peculiar ground of pure and simple poetry.

But the special peculiarity of the case now before us is that it was so much the greater man who was distanced and eclipsed; and this not merely by a minor poet, but by a humble admirer and a studious disciple of his own. Herrick, as a writer of elegies, epithalamiums, panegyrical or complimentary verses, is as plainly and as openly an imitator of his model as ever was the merest parasite of any leading poet, from the days of Chaucer and his satellites to the days of Tennyson and his. No Lydgate or Lytton was ever more obsequious in his discipleship; but for all his

loving and loyal protestations of passionate humility and of ardent reverence, we see at every turn, at every step, at every change of note, that what the master could not do the pupil can. When Chapman set sail after Marlowe, he went floundering and lurching in the wake of a vessel that went straight and smooth before the fullest and the fairest wind of song; but when Herrick follows Jonson the manner of movement or the method of progression is reversed. Macaulay, in a well-known passage, has spoken of Ben Jonson's 'rugged rhymes'; but rugged is not exactly the most appropriate epithet. Donne is rugged: Jonson is stiff. And if ruggedness of verse is a damaging blemish, stiffness of verse is a destructive infirmity. Ruggedness is curable; witness Donne's Anniversaries: stiffness is incurable; witness Jonson's Underwoods. In these, as in the preceding series called Under-The Forest, there is so lavish a display woods. of such various powers as cannot but excite the admiration they demand and deserve. They have every quality, their author would undoubtedly have maintained, that a student of poetry ought to expect and to applaud. What they want is that magic without which the very best verse is as far beneath the very best prose as the verse which has it is above all gross that ever was or ever can be written. And there never was a generation of Englishmen in which this magic was a gift so common as it was in Jonstons. We have but to open cities of the oriciles volumes which me ome to the expulsion taste and the undring disciden of Mr. Bulen, and we shall come upon scores after scores of light is from Ellicabethan songbooks as far bening comparison with the very best of Tonson's as Salabyroears is beyond comparison with Shirey as Marin is beyond comparison with Giovan in as Cit emágo is bejoiná comparison with Souther. There is embeddinal case of movement emporal mai grade of empression, in the freit which probed from Biff of the thee samed til to be act the most besimful song to the language I know and for my parp where it is to be found. Who on earth than or nor mould ever have supposed that the morthy Gufford dudy. But any one who does know anything more of the matter than the eating and remierat minuse own amounty verses were larv as Schelit and old as Don will admonledge than it mould be i fficult to enumerate the names of oness concemporary with Jonson from Frank Daruson to Europe Herrick who have left us sones at least as beautiful as that buyinning-· Oh do not manton with those eyes. Lest I be slok

with seeing.' And in 'the admirable Epode,' as Gifford calls it, which concludes Ben Jonson's contributions to Love's Martyr, though there is remarkable energy of expression, the irregularity and inequality of style are at least as conspicuous as the occasional vigour and the casual felicity of phrase. But if all were as good as the best passages this early poem of Jonson's would undoubtedly be very good indeed. Take for instance the description or definition of true love:

That is an essence far more gentle, fine, ¹
Pure, perfect, nay divine;
It is a golden chain let down from heaven,
Whose links are bright and even,
That falls like sleep on lovers.

Again:

O, who is he that in this peace enjoys
The elixir of all joys,
(A form more fresh than are the Eden bowers
And lasting as her flowers;
Richer than time, and as time's virtue rare,
Sober as saddest care,
A fixed thought, an eye untaught to glance;)
Who, blest with such high chance,
Would at suggestion of a steep desire
Cast himself from the spire
Of all his happiness?

¹ In the original edition, 'most gentile and fine': a curious Italianism which must have seemed questionable or unallowable to the author's maturer taste.

And few of Jonson's many moral or gnomic passages are finer than the following:

He that for love of goodness hateth ill
Is more crown-worthy still
Than he which for sin's penalty forbears
His heart sins, though he fears.

This metre, though very liable to the danger of monotony, is to my ear very pleasant; but that of the much admired and doubtless admirable address to Sir Robert Wroth is much less so. This poem is as good and sufficient an example of the author's ability and inability as could be found in the whole range of his elegiac or lyric works. It has excellent and evident qualities of style; energy and purity, clearness and sufficiency, simplicity and polish; but it is wanting in charm. Grace, attraction, fascination, the typical and essential properties of verse, it has not. Were Jonson to be placed among the gods of song, we should have to say of him what Æschylus says of Death—

μόνου δὲ Πειθὼ δαιμόνων ἀποστατεῖ.

The spirit of persuasive enchantment, the goddess of entrancing inspiration, kept aloof from him alone of all his peers or rivals. To men far weaker, to poets not worthy to be named with him

on the score of creative power, she gave the gift which from him was all but utterly withheld. And therefore it is that his place is not beside Shakespeare, Milton, or Shelley, but merely above Dryden, Byron, and Crabbe. The verses on Penshurst are among his best, wanting neither in grace of form nor stateliness of sound, if too surely wanting in the indefinable quality of distinction or inspiration: and the farewell to the world has a savour of George Herbert's style about it which suggests that the sacred poet must have been a sometime student of the secular. Beaumont. again, must have taken as a model of his lighter lyric style the bright and ringing verses on the proposition 'that women are but men's shadows.' The opening couplet of the striking address 'to Heaven' has been, it seems to me, misunderstood by Gifford; the meaning is not-'Can I not think of God without its making me melancholy?' but 'Can I not think of God without its being imputed or set down by others to a fit of dejection?' The few sacred poems which open the posthumous collection of his miscellaneous verse are far inferior to the best of Herrick's Noble Numbers; although the second of the three must probably have served the minor poet as an occasional model.

The Celebration of Charis in ten lyric pieces would be a graceful example of Jonson's lighter and brighter inspiration if the ten were reduced to eight. His anapæsts are actually worse than Shelley's: which hope would fain have assumed and charity would fain have believed to be impossible. 'We will take our plan from the new world of man, and our work shall be called the Pro-me-the-an '-even the hideous and excruciating cacophony of that horrible sentence is not so utterly inconceivable as verse, is not so fearfully and wonderfully immetrical as this: 'And from her arched brows such a grace sheds itself through the face.' The wheeziest of barrel-organs, the most broken-winded of bagpipes, grinds or snorts out sweeter melody than that. But the heptasyllabic verses among which this monstrous abortion rears its amorphous head are better than might have been expected; not, as Gifford says of one example, 'above all praise,' but creditable at their best and tolerable at their worst.

The miscellaneous verses collected under the pretty and appropriate name of Underwoods comprise more than a few of Ben Jonson's happiest and most finished examples of lyric, elegiac, and gnomic or didactic poetry; and likewise not a

little of such rigid and frigid work as makes us regret the too strenuous and habitual application of so devoted a literary craftsman to his professional round of labour. The fifth of these poems, A Nymph's Passion, is not only pretty and ingenious, but in the structure of its peculiar stanza may remind a modern reader of some among the many metrical experiments or inventions of a more exquisite and spontaneous lyric poet, Miss Christina Rossetti. The verses 'on a lover's dust, made sand for an hour-glass,' just come short of excellence in their fantastic way; those on his picture are something more than smooth and neat; those against jealousy are exceptionally sweet and spontaneous, again recalling the manner of the poetess just mentioned; with a touch of something like Shelley's-

I wish the sun should shine
On all men's fruits and flowers, as well as mine—

and also of something like George Herbert's at his best. *The Dream* is one of Jonson's most happily inspired and most happily expressed fancies; the close of it is for once not less than charming.

Of the various elegies and epistles included in

this collection it need only be said that there is much thoughtful and powerful writing in most if not in all of them, with occasional phrases or couplets of rare felicity, and here and there a noble note of enthusiasm or a masterly touch of satire. In the epistle to Sir Edward Sackvile the sketch of the 'infants of the sword' who 'give thanks by stealth' and in whispers for benefits which they are ready to disown with imprecations in public is worthy of the hand which drew Bobadil and Tucca. The sonnet to Lady Mary Wroth, good in itself, is characteristic in its preference of the orthodox Italian structure to the English or Shakespearean form. The four very powerful and remarkable elegies on a lover's quarrel and separation I should be inclined to attribute rather to Donne than to Jonson; their earnest passion, their quaint frankness, their verbal violence, their eccentric ardour of expression, at once unabashed and vehement, spontaneous and ingenious, are all of them typical characteristics of the future dean in the secular and irregular days of his hot poetic youth. The fourth and final poem of the little series is especially impressive and attractive. The turn of the sentences and the cadence of the verse are no less significant

of the authorship than is a noble couplet in the poem immediately preceding them—which would at once be recognized by a competent reader as Jonson's:

So may the fruitful vine my temples steep, And fame wake for me when I yield to sleep!

The 'epistle answering to one that asked to be sealed of the tribe of Ben' is better in spirit than in execution; manful, straightforward, and upright. The 'epigram' or rather satire 'on the Court Pucelle' goes beyond even the license assumed by Pope in the virulent ferocity of its personal attack on a woman. This may be explained, or at least illustrated, by the fact that Ben Jonson's views regarding womanhood in general were radically cynical though externally chivalrous: a charge which can be brought against no other poet or dramatist of his age. He could pay more splendid compliments than any of them to this or that particular woman; the deathless epitaph on 'Sydney's sister, Pembroke's mother,' is but the crowning flower of a garland, the central jewel of a set; but no man has said coarser (I had wellnigh written, viler) things against the sex to which these exceptionally honoured patronesses belonged. This characteristic is not more significant than the

corresponding evidence given by comparison of his readiness to congratulate and commend other poets and poeticules for work not always worthy of his notice, and at the same time to indulge in such sweeping denunciation of all contemporary poetry as would not have misbecome the utterance of incarnate envy-in other words, as might have fallen from the lips of Byron. See, for one most flagrant and glaring example of what might seem the very lunacy of malignity, a passage in what Coleridge has justly called 'his splendid dedication of The Fox.' Here he talks of raising 'the despised head of poetry again, and stripping her out of those rotten and base rags wherewith the times have adulterated her form.' It is difficult to resist a temptation to emulate Ben Jonson's own utmost vehemence of language when we remember that this sentence is dated the 11th of February, 1607. Nine years before the death of Shakespeare the greatest writer of all time, the most wonderful human creature of all ages, was in the very zenith of his powers and his glory. And this was a contemporary poet's view of the condition of contemporary poetry. He was not more unlucky as a courtier and a prophet when he proclaimed the triumphant security of the English government as twice ensured by the birth of the future King James II.

The memorial ode on the death of Sir Henry Morison has thoughtful and powerful touches in it, as well as one stanza so far above the rest that it gains by a process which would impair its effect if the poem were on the whole even a tolerably good one. The famous lines on 'the plant and flower of light' can be far better enjoyed when cut away from the context. The opening is as eccentrically execrable as the epode of the solitary strophe which redeems from all but unqualified execration a poem in which Gifford finds 'the very soul of Pindar'—whose reputation would in that case be the most inexplicable of riddles. Far purer in style and far more equable in metre is the 'ode gratulatory? to Lord Weston; and the 'epithalamion' on the marriage of that nobleman's son, though not without inequalities, crudities, and platitudes, is on the whole a fine and dignified example of ceremonial poetry. Another of the laureate's best effusions of official verse is the short ode which bids his 'gentle Muse' rouse herself to celebrate the king's birthday, 'though now our green conceits be grey,' with good wishes which have a tragic ring in the modern reader's ear. A

more unequal poem than the elegy on the Marchioness of Winchester is hardly to be found anywhere; but the finest passages are noble indeed. The elegiac poems on the famous demi-mondaine Venetia Stanley, who made a comparatively respectable end as Lady Digby, are equally startling and amusing in their attribution to that heroine of a character which would justify the beatification if not the canonization of its immaculate possessor. The first of these is chiefly remarkable for a singular Scotticism—' where Seraphim take tent of ordering all'; the fragment of the second, as an early attempt-I know not whether it be the earliest—to introduce the terza rima into English verse. There are one or two fine stanzas in the fourth, and the Apotheosis of this singular saint has a few good couplets; it contains, however, probably the most horrible and barbarous instance of inversion which the violated language can display:

in her hand With boughs of palm, a crowned victrice stand.

Such indefinable enormities as this cannot but incline us to think that this great scholar, this laurelled invader and conqueror of every field and every province of classic learning, was *intus et in*

cute an irreclaimable and incurable barbarian. And assuredly this impression will be neither removed nor modified when we come to examine his translations from Latin poetry. If the report is to be believed which attributes to Ben Jonson the avowal of an opinion that above all things Transla. he excelled in translation, it must be tions. admitted that for once the foolish theory which represents men of genius as incapable of recognizing what is or is not their best work or their most distinguishing faculty is justified and exemplified after a fashion so memorable that the exception must be invoked to prove the rule. For a worse translator than Ben Jonson never committed a double outrage on two languages at once. I should be reluctant to quote examples of this lamentable truth, if it were not necessary to vindicate his contemporaries from such an imputation as is conveyed in the general belief that his method of translation is merely the method of his age. The fact is that it is as exceptionally abominable as his genius, when working on its own proper and original lines. is exceptionally admirable. I am no great lover of Horace, but I cannot pretend to think that the words

Si torrere jecur quæris idoneum

are adequately rendered by the words

If a fit liver thou dost seek to toast.

Fate and fire did a double injury, if not a double injustice, to Ben Jonson, when his commentary on Horace's Art of Poetry was consumed and his translation of the text preserved. The commentary in which Donne was represented under the name of Criticus must have been one of the most interesting and valuable of Jonson's prose works: the translation is one of those miracles of incompetence, incongruity, and insensibility, which must be seen to be believed. It may be admitted that there is a very happy instance of exact and pointed rendering from the ninth and tenth lines of the original in the eleventh and twelfth lines of the translation.

Pictoribus atque poetis Quidlibet audendi semper fuit æqua potestas. Scimus.

Pope himself could not have rendered this well-known passage more neatly, more smoothly, more perfectly and more happily than thus—

But equal power to painter and to poet Of daring all hath still been given: we know it.

And in the seventh line following we come upon this indescribable horror—an abomination of which Abraham Fraunce or Gabriel Harvey would by charitable readers have been considered incapable: as perhaps indeed they were.

A scarlet piece or two stitch'd in; when or Diana's grove or altar, with the bor-D'ring circles of swift waters, &c., &c.

The bellman writes better verses,' said Mr. Osbaldistone, when he threw poor Frank's away. Walt Whitman writes no worse, a modern critic will reflect on reading these.

The version of one of Martial's gracefullest epigrams flows more pleasantly than usual till it ends with a horrible jolt, thus:—

He that but living half his days dies such, Makes his life longer than 'twas given him, much.

And Echo answers—Much! Gifford, however, waxes ecstatic over these eight lines. 'It is the most beautiful of all the versions of this elegant poem,' and, if we may believe him, 'clearly and fully expresses the whole of its meaning.' Witness the second line—

Thou worthy in eternal flower to fare.

That is no more English than it is Latin—no more accurate than it is intelligible. The original is as simple as it is lovely:—

Liber in æternâ vivere digne rosâ.

It would be worse than superfluous to look among his other versions from Horace for further evidence of Ben Jonson's incomparable incompetence as a translator. But as this has been hitherto very insufficiently insisted on,—his reputation as a poet and a scholar standing apparently between the evidence of this fact and the recognition of it,—I will give one crowning example from *The Poetaster*. This is what Virgil is represented as reading to Augustus—and Augustus as hearing without a shriek of agony and horror.

Meanwhile the skies 'gan thunder, and in tail 'Of that fell pouring storms of sleet and hail.

'In tail of that'! *Proh Deûm atque hominum fidem!* And it is Virgil—Virgil, of all men and all poets—to whom his traducer has the assurance to attribute this inexpressible atrocity of outrage!

The case of Ben Jonson is the great standing example of a truth which should never be forgotten or overlooked; that no amount of learning, of labour, or of culture will supply the place of natural taste and native judgment—will avail in any slightest degree to confer the critical faculty upon a man to whom nature has denied it. Just judg-

¹ Compare *Æn*. iv. 160.

ment of others, just judgment of himself, was all but impossible to this great writer, this consummate and indefatigable scholar, this generous and enthusiastic friend. The noble infirmity of excess in benevolence is indisputably no less obvious in three great writers of our own century; great, each of them, like Ben Jonson, in prose as well as in verse: one of them greater than he, one of them equal, and one of them hardly to be accounted equal with him. Victor Hugo, Walter Savage Landor, and Théophile Gautier, were doubtless as exuberant in generosity—the English poet was perhaps as indiscriminate in enthusiasm of patronage or of sympathy—as even the promiscuous panegyrist of Shakespeare, of Fletcher, of Chapman, of Drayton, of Browne, of Brome, and of May; and moreover of one Stephens, of one Rutter, of one Wright, of one Warre, and of one Filmer. Of these last five names, that of the worthy Master Joseph Rutter-Ben's 'dear son, and right learned friend'—is the only one which signifies to me the existence of an author not utterly unknown. His spiritual father or theatrical sponsor is most copious and most cordial in his commendations of the good man's pastoral drama; he has not mentioned its one crowning excellence - the quality for which, having

tried it every night for upwards of six weeks running, I can confidently and conscientiously recommend it. Chloral is not only more dangerous but very much less certain as a soporific: the sleeplessness which could resist the influence of Mr. Rutter's verse can be curable only by dissolution; the eyes which can keep open through the perusal of six consecutive pages must never hope to find rest but in the grave.

The many ceremonial or occasional poems addressed to friends and patrons of various ranks and characters, from the king and queen to a Mr. Burges and a Mr. Squib, are of equally various interest, now graver and now lighter, to a careful student of Ben Jonson as a poet and a man. Nor. when due account is taken of the time and its conventional habits of speech, does it seem to me that any of them can be justly charged with servility or flattery, or, as the writer might have said, with 'assentation.' But these effusions or improvisations are of no more serious importance than the exquisitely neat and terse composition of Convivales, the 'Leges Convivales,' or the admirable good sense and industry, the admirable perspicacity and perspicuity, which will be recognized no less in the Latin than in the English part of his

English Grammar. It is interesting to observe an anticipation of Landor's principle with respect to questions of orthography, in the preference English given to the Latin form of spelling for Grammar. words of Latin derivation, while admitting that this increase of accuracy would bring the written word no nearer to the sound uttered in speaking. The passage is worth transcription as an example of delicately scrupulous accuracy and subtly conscientious refinement in explanation.

Alii hæc haud inconsultò scribunt abil, stabil, fabul; tanquam a fontibus habilis, stabilis, fabula: veriùs, sed nequicquam proficiunt. Nam consideratiùs auscultanti nec i nec u est, sed tinnitus quidam, vocalis naturam habens, quæ naturaliter his liquidis inest.

A point on which I am sorry to rest uncertain whether Landor would have felt as much sympathy with Jonson's view as I feel myself is the regret expressed by the elder poet for the loss of the Saxon characters that distinguished the two different sounds now both alike expressed, and expressed with equal inaccuracy, by the two letters th. 'And in this,' says Jonson—as it seems to me, most reasonably, 'consists the greatest difficulty of our alphabet and true writing.'

The text of the grammar, both Latin and

English, requires careful revision and correction; but indeed as much must be said of the text of Jonson's works in general. Gifford did very much for it, but he left not a little to be done. And the arrangement adopted in Colonel Cunningham's beautiful and serviceable edition of 1875 is the most extraordinary—at least, I hope and believe so—on record. All the misreadings of the edition of 1816 are retained in the text, where they stand not merely uncorrected but unremarked; so that the bewildered student must refer at random, on the even chance of disappointment, to an appendix in which he may find them irregularly registered, with some occasional comment on the previous editor's negligence and caprice: a method, to put it as mildly as possible, somewhat provocative of strong language on the part of a studious and belated reader-language for which it cannot rationally be imagined that it is he who will be registered by the recording angel as culpably responsible. What is wanted in the case of so great an English classic is of course nothing less than this: a careful and complete edition of all his extant writings, with all the various readings of the various editions published during his lifetime. This is the very least that should be exacted; and this

is less than has yet been supplied. Edition after edition of Shakespeare is put forth under the auspices of scholars or of dunces without a full and plain enumeration of the exact differences of text —the corrections, suppressions, alterations, and modifications-which distinguish the text of the quartos from the too frequently garbled and mangled, the sometimes transfigured and glorified text of the folio. And consequently not one devoted student in a thousand has a chance of knowing what he has a right to know of the gradations and variations in expression, the development and the self-discipline in display, of the most transcendent intelligence that ever illuminated humanity. And in the case of Shakespeare's most loyal comrade and panegyrist—though sometimes, it may be, his rather captious rival and critic—the neglect of his professed devotees and editorial interpreters has been scarcely less scandalous and altogether as incomprehensible. In every edition which makes any pretence to completeness, or to satisfaction of a serious student's indispensable requisites and inevitable demands, the first text of Every Man in his Humour should of course be given in full. Snatches and scraps of it are given in the notes to the edition of 1816; the first act is

reprinted—the first act alone—in the appendix to the first volume of the edition of 1875. What would be said by Hellenists or Latinists if such contemptuous indolence, such insolence of neglect, were displayed by the editor of a Greek or Latin poet—assuming that his edition had been meant for other than fourth-form or fifth-form service? Compare the devotion of their very best editors to Shakespeare and to Jonson with the devotion of Mr. Ellis to Catullus and Mr. Munro to Lucretius. It is a shame that Englishmen should not be forthcoming who would think it worth while to expend as much labour, and would be competent to bring that labour to as good an end, in the service of their own immortal countrymen, as is expended and as is attained by classical scholars in the service of alien and not more adorable gods. And on one point—a point indeed of more significance than importance—the capricious impertinence of such editors as do condescend to undertake any part of such a task is so inexplicable except on one supposition that we are tempted to embrace, or at least to accept, the assumption that the editor (for instance) of Ben Jonson considers the author of The Silent Woman, Bartholomew Fair, and certain metrical emetics classified under the head

of Epigrams, as a writer fit to be placed in the hands of schoolgirls. And even then it is difficult to imagine why we come upon certain rows of asterisks in the record of his conversations with Drummond, and in the anonymous interlude written —as Gifford supposes—'for the christening of a son of the Earl of Newcastle, to whom the king or the prince stood godfather.' Even if Jonson had taken—as on such an occasion it would be strange if he had taken—the utmost license of his friends Aristophanes and Rabelais, this would be no reason for treating the reader like a schoolboy or a Dauphin. What a man of genius has written for a public occasion is public property thenceforward and for ever: and the pretence of a man like Gifford to draw the line and determine the limit of publicity is inexpressibly preposterous.

The little interlude, however broad and even coarse in its realistic pleasantry, is a quaint and spirited piece of work; but there are other matters in Colonel Cunningham's appendix which have no right, demonstrable or imaginable, to the place they occupy. It is incredible, it is inconceivable, that Jonson should ever have written such a line as this by way of a Latin verse:

Macte: tuo scriptores lectoresque labore (!!!)

'Les chassepots partiraient d'eux-mêmes '-birch would make itself into spontaneous rods for the schoolboy who could perpetrate so horrible an atrocity. The repulsive and ridiculous rubbish which has ignorantly and absurdly been taken for 'a fragment of one of the lost quaternions of Eupheme' is part, I am sorry to say, of an elegy by Francis Beaumont on one Lady Markham. It is an intolerable scandal that the public should be content to endure such an outrage as the intrusion of another man's abominable absurdities into the text of such a writer as Ben Jonson. This effusion of his young friend's, which must surely have been meant as a joke—and a very bad, not to say a very brutal one, is probably the most hideous nonsense ever written on the desecrated subject of death and decay. A smaller but a serious example of negligence and incompetence is patent in the text of the ten lines contributed by Jonson to the Annalia Dubrensia—that most pleasant and curious athletic anthology, the reissue of which is one of the wellnigh countless obligations conferred on students of the period by the devoted industry, energy, and ability of Dr. Grosart. He, of course, could not fail to see that the first of these lines was corrupt. 'I cannot bring my Muse to dropp

Vies' is obviously neither sense nor metre. It is rather with diffidence than with confidence that I would suggest the reading double in place of the palpably corrupt word drop: but from Gifford's explanation of the gambling term vie I should infer that this reading, which certainly rectifies the metre, might also restore the sense. Another obvious error is to be noted in the doggrel lines on Lady Ogle, which afford a curious and compact example of Ben Jonson's very worst vices of style and metre. Still, as Ben was not in the habit of writing flat nonsense, we ought evidently to read 'in the sight of Angels,' not, as absurdly printed in the edition of 1875 (ix. 326), 'in the Light'; especially as the next verse ends with that word. The commendatory verses on Cynthia's Revenge which reappear at page 346 of the same volume had appeared on page 332 of the volume immediately preceding. Such editorial derelictions and delinquencies are enough to inoculate the most patient reader's humour with the acerbity of Gifford's or Carlyle's. Again, this appendix gives only one or two fragments of the famous additional scenes to The Spanish Tragedy, while the finest and most important passages are omitted and ignored. For one thing, however, we have

reason to be grateful to the compiler who has inserted for the first time among Ben Jonson's works the fine and flowing stanzas described by their author as an allegoric ode. This poem, which in form is Horatian, has no single stanza so beautiful or so noble as the famous third strophe of the Pindaric ode to Sir Lucius Cary on the death of Sir Henry Morison; but its general superiority in purity of style and fluidity of metre is as remarkable as the choice and use of proper names with such a dexterous felicity as to emulate while it recalls the majestic and magnificent instincts of Marlowe and of Milton.

If the fame of Ben Jonson were in any degree dependent on his minor or miscellaneous works in verse, it would be difficult to assign him a place above the third or fourth rank of writers belonging to the age of Shakespeare. His station in the first class of such writers, and therefore in the front rank of English authors, is secured mainly by the excellence of his four masterpieces in comedy; The Fox and The Alchemist, The Staple of News and Every Man in his Humour: but a single leaf of his Discoveries is worth all his lyrics, tragedies, elegies, and epigrams together. That golden little book of noble thoughts and subtle observations is

the one only province of his vast and varied empire which yet remains for us to examine; and in none other will there be found more ample and more memorable evidence how truly great a man demands our homage—'on this side idolatry'—for the imperishable memory of Ben Jonson.



III DISCOVERIES



III

DISCOVERIES

THAT chance is the ruler of the world I should be sorry to believe and reluctant to affirm; but it would be difficult for any competent and careful student to maintain that chance is not the ruler of the world of letters. Gray's odes are still, I suppose, familiar to thousands who know nothing of Donne's Anniversaries; and Bacon's Essays are conventionally if not actually familiar to thousands who know nothing of Ben Jonson's Discoveries. And yet it is certain that in fervour of inspiration, in depth and force and glow of thought and emotion and expression, Donne's verses are as far above Gray's as Jonson's notes or observations on men and morals, on principles and on facts, are superior to Bacon's in truth of insight, in breadth of view, in vigour of reflection and in concision of eloquence. The dry curt style of the statesman, docked and trimmed into sentences that are

regularly snapped off or snipped down at the close of each deliverance, is as alien and as far from the fresh and vigorous spontaneity of the poet's as is the trimming and hedging morality of the essay on 'simulation and dissimulation' from the spirit and instinct of the man who 'of all things loved to be called honest.' But indeed, from the ethical point of view which looks merely or mainly to character, the comparison is little less than an insult to the Laureate; and from the purely intelligent or æsthetic point of view I should be disposed to say, or at least inclined to think, that the comparison would be hardly less unduly complimentary to the Chancellor.

For at the very opening of these Explorata, or Discoveries, we find ourselves in so high and so pure an atmosphere of feeling and of thought that we cannot but recognize and rejoice in the presence and the influence of one of the noblest. manliest, most honest and most helpful natures that ever dignified and glorified a powerful intelligence and an admirable genius. In the very first note, the condensed or concentrated quintessence of a Baconian essay on Fortune, we find these among other lofty and weighty words: 'Heaven prepares good men with crosses; but no ill can

happen to a good man.' 'That which happens to any man, may to every man. But it is in his reason what he accounts it and will make it.'

There is perhaps in the structure of this sentence something too much of the Latinist—too strong a flavour of the style of Tacitus in its elaborate if not laborious terseness of expression. But the following could hardly be bettered.

No man is so foolish but may give another good counsel sometimes; and no man is so wise but may easily err, if he will take no other's counsel but his own. But very few men are wise by their own counsel, or learned by their own teaching. For he that was only taught by himself had a fool to his master.

The mind's ear may find or fancy a silvery ring of serene good sense in the note of that reflection; but the ring of what follows is pure gold.

There is a necessity all men should love their country; he that professeth the contrary may be delighted with his words, but his heart is [not] there.

The magnificent expansion or paraphrase of this noble thought in the fourth scene of Landor's magnificent tragedy of *Count Julian* should be familiar to all capable students of English poetry at its purest and proudest height of sublime contemplation. That probably or rather undoubtedly

unconscious echo of the sentiment of an older poet and patriot has in it the prolonged reverberation and repercussion of music which we hear in the echoes of thunder or a breaking sea.

Again, how happy in the bitterness of its truth is the next remark: 'Natures that are hardened to evil you shall sooner break than make straight: they are like poles that are crooked and dry: there is no attempting them.' And how grand is this:

I cannot think nature is so spent and decayed that she can bring forth nothing worth her former years. She is always the same, like herself; and when she collects her strength, is abler still. *Men are decayed, and studies:* she is not.

Jonson never wrote a finer verse than that; and very probably he never observed that it was a verse.

The next note is one of special interest to all students of the great writer who has so often been described as a blind worshipper and a servile disciple of classical antiquity.

- 'I know nothing can conduce more to letters,' says the too obsequious observer of Tacitus and of Cicero in
- ¹ As in the production of Shakespeare—if his good friend Ben had but known it.

the composition of his Roman tragedies, 'than to examine the writings of the ancients, and not to rest on their sole authority, or take all upon trust from them; provided the plagues of judging and pronouncing against them be away; such as are envy, bitterness, precipitation, impudence, and scurril scoffing. For, to all the observations of the ancients, we have our own experience; which if we will use and apply, we have better means to pronounce. It is true they opened the gates, and made the way, that went before us; but as guides, not commanders: Non domini nostri sed duces fuere. Truth lies open to all; it is no man's several. Patet omnibus veritas: nondum est occupata. Multum ex illâ etiam futuris relictum est.'

Time and space would fail me to transcribe all that is worth transcription, to comment on everything that deserves commentary, in this treasurehouse of art and wisdom, eloquence and good sense. But the following extract could be passed over by no eye but a mole's or a bat's.

I do not desire to be equal with those that went before; but to have my reason examined with theirs, and so much faith to be given them, or me, as those shall evict [in modern English—if the text is not corrupt—'as the comparison or confrontation of theirs with mine shall elicit']. I am neither author nor fautor of any sect. I will have no man addict himself to me; but if I have

¹ The scandalously neglected text reads *relicta*. Perhaps we should read 'Multa—relicta sunt.'

anything right, defend it as Truth's, not mine, save as it conduceth to a common good. It profits not me to have any man fence or fight for me, to flourish, or take my side. Stand for Truth, and 'tis enough.

The haughty vindication of 'arts that respect the mind' as 'nobler than those that serve the body, though we less can be without them' (the latter), is at once amusingly and admirably Jonsonian. Admitting the ignoble fact that without such 'arts' as 'tillage, spinning, weaving, building, &c.,' 'we could scarce sustain life a day,' a proposition which it certainly would seem difficult to dispute, he proceeds in the loftiest tone of professional philosophy: 'But these were the works of every hand; the other of the brain only, and those the most generous and exalted wits and spirits, that cannot rest or acquiesce. The mind of man is still fed with labour: opere pascitur.'

This conscientious and self-conscious pride of intellect finds even a nobler and more memorable expression in the admirable words which instruct or which remind us of the truth that 'it is as great a spite to be praised in the wrong place, and by the wrong person, as can be done to a noble nature.' A sentence worthy to be set beside the fittest motto for all loyal men—'Æqua laus est a laudatis

laudari et ab improbis improbari.' Which it would be well that every man worthy to apply it should lay to heart, and act and bear himself accordingly.

It is to be wished that the dramatist and humourist had always or had usually borne in mind the following excellent definition or reflection of the aphoristic philosopher or student: 'A tedious person is one a man would leap a steeple from, gallop down any steep hill to avoid him; forsake his meat, sleep, nature itself, with all her benefits, to shun him.' What then shall we say of the courtiers in *Cynthia's Revels* and the vapourers in *Bartholomew Fair?*

The following is somewhat especially suggestive of a present political application; and would find its appropriate setting in a modern version of the *Irish Masque*.

He is a narrow-minded man that affects a triumph in any glorious study; but to triumph in a lie, and a lie themselves have forged, is frontless. Folly often goes beyond her bounds; but Impudence knows none.

From the forty-third to the forty-eighth entry inclusive these disconnected notes should be read as a short continuous essay on envy and calumny.

For weight, point, and vigour, it would hardly be possible to overpraise it.

In the admirable note on such 'foolish lovers' as 'wish the same to their friends as their enemies would,' merely that they might have occasion to display the constancy of their regard, there is a palpable and preposterous misprint, which reduces to nonsense a remarkably fine passage: 'They make a causeway to their courtesy by injury; as if it were not honester to do nothing than to seek a way to do good by a mischief.' For the obviously right word 'courtesy' the unspeakable editors read 'country'; which let him explain who can.

The two notes on injuries and benefits are observable for their wholesome admixture of common sense with magnanimity.

Injuries do not extinguish courtesies: they only suffer them not to appear fair. For a man that doth me an injury after a courtesy takes not away that courtesy, but defaces it: as he that writes other verses upon my verses takes not away the first letters, but hides them.

Surely no sentence more high-minded and generous than that was ever written: nor one more sensible and dignified than this:—

The doing of courtesies aright is the mixing of the

respects for his own sake and for mine. He that doeth them merely for his own sake is like one that feeds his cattle to sell them: he hath his horse well drest for Smithfield.

The following touch of mental autobiography is not less interesting than curious. Had Shake-speare but left us the like!

I myself could in my youth have repeated all that ever I had made, and so continued till I was past forty: since, it is much decayed in me. Yet I can repeat whole books that I have read, and poems of some selected friends, which I have liked to charge my memory with. It was wont to be faithful to me; but, shaken with age now, and sloth, which weakens the strongest abilities, it may perform somewhat, but cannot promise much. By exercise it is to be made better, and serviceable. soever I pawned with it while I was young, and a boy, it offers me readily, and without stops: but what I trust to it now, or have done of later years, it lays up more negligently, and oftentimes loses; so that I receive mine own (though frequently called for) as if it were new and borrowed. Nor do I always find presently from it what I seek: but while I am doing another thing, that I laboured for will come; and what I sought with trouble will offer itself when I am quiet. Now in some men [was Shakespeare, we must ask ourselves, one of these?] I have found it as happy as nature, who, whatsoever they read or pen, they can say without book presently; as if they did then write in their mind. And it is more a

wonder in such as have a swift style, for their memories are commonly slowest; such as torture their writings, and go into council for every word, must needs fix somewhat, and make it their own at last, though but through their own vexation.

I cannot but imagine that Jonson must have witnessed this wonder in the crowning case of Shakespeare; the swiftness of whose 'style' or composition was matter of general note.

The anti-Gallican or anti-democratic view of politics can never be more vividly or happily presented than in these brilliant and incisive words:—

Suffrages in Parliament are numbered, not weighed: nor can it be otherwise in those public councils, where nothing is so unequal as the equality: for there, how odd soever men's brains or wisdoms are, their power is always even and the same.

But the most cordial hater or scorner of parliaments, whether from the Carlylesque or the Bonapartist point of vantage, must allow that the truth expressed in the two first sentences following is more certain and more precious than the doctrine just cited.

Truth is man's proper good, and the only immortal thing was given to our mortality to use. No good

Christian or ethnic, if he be honest, can miss it: no statesman or patriot should. For without truth all the actions of mankind are craft, malice, or what you will rather than wisdom. Homer says he hates him worse than hell-mouth that utters one thing with his tongue and keeps another in his breast. Which high expression was grounded on divine reason: for a lying mouth is a stinking pit, and murders with the contagion it venteth. Besides, nothing is lasting that is feigned; it will have another face than it had ere long. As Euripides saith, 'No lie ever grows old.'

It would be well if this were so: but the inveterate reputation of Euripides as a dramatic poet is hardly reconcilable with the truth of his glibly optimistic assumption. Nor, had that fluent and facile dealer in flaccid verse and sentimental sophistry spoken truth for once in this instance, should we have had occasion to wonder at the admiration expressed for him by the most subtle and sincere, the most profound and piercing intelligence of our time; nor could that sense of reverential amazement have found spontaneous expression in the following couplet of Hudibrastic doggrel:—

That the huckster of pathos, whose gift was insipid ease, Finds favour with Browning, must puzzle Euripides.

But Jonson himself, it seems to me, was far

less trustworthy as a critic of poetry than as a judge on ethics or a student of character. The tone of supercilious goodwill and friendly condonation which distinguishes his famous note on Shakespeare is unmistakable except by the most wilful perversity of prepossession. His noble metrical tribute to Shakespeare's memory must of course be taken into account when we are disposed to think too hardly of this honest if egotistic eccentricity of error: but it would be foolish to suppose that the most eloquent cordiality of a ceremonial poem could express more of one man's real and critical estimate of another than a deliberate reflection of later date. And it needs the utmost possible exertion of charity, the most generous exercise of justice, to forgive the final phrase of preposterous patronage and considerate condescension—'There was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned.' The candid author of Sejanus could on the whole afford to admit so much with respect to the popular author of Hamlet.

In the subsequent essay, divided under ten several heads into ten several notes, on 'the difference of wits,' or the diversity of accomplishments and understandings, there is much worth study for its soundness of judgment, its accuracy of definition, and its felicity of expression. It would be well if educational and professional formalists would bear in mind the truth that 'there is no doctrine will do good, where nature is wanting'; and nothing could be neater, terser, or truer than the definition of those characters 'that are forward and bold; and these will do every little thing easily; I mean, that is hard by and next them, which they will utter unretarded without any shamefastness. These never perform much, but quickly. They are what they are, on the sudden; they show presently, like grain that, scattered on the top of the ground, shoots up, but takes no root; has a yellow blade, but the ear empty. They are wits of good promise at first, but there is an ingenîstitium--a wit-stand: they stand still at sixteen, they get no higher.'

As well worth remark and recollection are the succeeding notes on 'others, that labour only to ostentation; and are ever more busy about the colours and surface of a work than in the matter and foundation: for that is hid, the other is seen'; and on those whose style of composition is purposely 'rough and broken—and if it would come gently, they trouble it of purpose. They would

not have it run without rubs: as if that style were more strong and manly that struck the ear with a kind of unevenness. These men err not by chance, but knowingly and willingly; they are like men that affect a fashion by themselves, have some singularity in a ruff, cloak, or hat-band; or their beards specially cut to provoke beholders, and set a mark upon themselves. They would be reprehended, while they are looked on. And this vice, one, that is in authority with the rest, loving, delivers over to them to be imitated; so that oft-times the faults which he fell into, the others seek for: this is the danger, when vice becomes a precedent.'

It is difficult to imagine that Jonson was not here thinking of the great writer whom 'he esteemed the first poet in the world in some things,' but upon whom he passed the too sweeping though too plausible sentence 'that Donne, for not being understood, would perish.' Nor can we suppose that he was not alluding to Daniel—the inoffensive object of his implacable satire—when he laid a 'chastising hand' on 'others that have no composition at all, but a kind of tuning and rhyming fall, in what they write. It runs and slides, and only makes a sound. Women's poets

they are called, as you have women's tailors.—You may sound these wits and find the depth of them with your middle finger. They are creambowl- (or but puddle-) deep.'

An amusing anticipation of the peculiar genius for elaborate mendacity which distinguishes and connects the names of De Quincey and Mérimée will be found in Jonson's words of stern and indignant censure on 'some who, after they have got authority, or, which is less, opinion, by their writings, to have read much, dare presently to feign whole books and authors, and lie safely. For what never was will not easily be found; not by the most curious.' Certainly it was not by the innocent readers whose research into the original authorities for the history of the revolt of the Tartars, or whose interest in the original text of Clara Gazul's plays and the Illyrian ballads of La Guzla, must have given such keen delight to those two frontless and matchless charlatans of genius.

The keen and scornful intelligence of Jonson finds no less admirable expression in the two succeeding notes; of which the first sets a brand on such cunning plagiarists as protest against all reading, and so 'think to divert the sagacity of

their readers from themselves, and cool the scent of their own fox-like thefts;' but, as he proceeds to observe, 'the obstinate contemners of all helps and arts are in a 'wretcheder' case than even these. His description of such pretenders is too lifelike. and too vivid in its perennial veracity, to be overlooked; 'such as presuming on their own naturals (which perhaps are excellent) dare deride all diligence, and seem to mock at the terms when they understand not the things; thinking that way to get off wittily with their ignorance. These are imitated often by such as are their peers in negligence, though they cannot be in nature; and they utter all they can think with a kind of violence and indisposition; unexamined, without relation to person, place, or any fitness else; and the more wilful and stubborn they are in it, the more learned they are esteemed of the multitude, through their excellent vice of judgment; who think those things the stronger, that have no art; as if to break were better than to open; or to rend asunder, gentler than to loose.'

In the tenth section or subdivision of this irregular and desultory but incisive and masterly essay we find a singular combination of critical insight with personal prejudice—of general truth

with particular error. But the better part is excellent alike in reflection and in expression.

It cannot but come to pass that these men who commonly seek to do more than enough may sometimes happen on something that is good and great; but very seldom: and when it comes it doth not recompense the rest of their ill.—The true artificer will not run away from nature, as he were afraid of her; or depart from life, and the likeness of truth; but speak to the capacity of his hearers.

The rest of the note is valuable as a studious and elaborate expression of Jonson's theory or ideal of dramatic poetry, couched in apt and eloquent phrases of thoughtful and balanced rhetoric; regrettable only for the insulting reference to the first work of a yet greater poet than himself, to whose 'mighty line' he had paid immortal homage in an earlier and a better mood of juágment.

But however prone he may be to error or perversity in particular instances or in personal examples, he is constantly and nobly right in his axiomatic reflections and his general observations. The following passage seems to me a magnificent illustration of this truth.

I know no disease of the soul but ignorance; not of

the arts and sciences, but of itself: yet relating to those it is a pernicious evil, the darkener of man's life, the disturber of his reason, and the common confounder of truth; with which a man goes groping in the dark, no otherwise than if he were blind. Great understandings are most racked and troubled with it; nay, sometimes they will rather choose to die than not to know the things they study for. Think then what an evil it is, and what [a] good the contrary.

The ensuing note on knowledge has less depth of direct insight, less force of practical reason; but the definition which follows is singularly eloquent and refined, however scholastic and irrational in its casuistic and rhetorical subtlety.

Knowledge is the action of the soul, and is perfect without the senses,² as having the seeds of all science and virtue in itself; but not without the service of the senses; by these organs the soul works: she is a perpetual agent, prompt and subtle; but often flexible and erring, entangling herself like a silkworm: but her reason is a weapon with two edges, and cuts through.

I am inclined to suspect that we may discern in

- ¹ No modern reader of these lofty words can fail to call to mind the sublime pathos and the historic interest of Mr. Browning's glorious poem, A Grammarian's Funeral.
- ² It is a pity we are not told how; for to the ordinary intelligence of reasoning mankind it would appear that 'without the senses' not only could knowledge not be perfect, but it could not even exist in the most inchoate or embryonic phase of being.

the next note another fragment of autobiography. For it may be doubted whether 'the boon Delphic god,' so admirably described by his faithful acolyte Marmion as presiding in the form of a human Laureate over the Bacchanalian oracle of Apollo, can ever have been able to say with equal truth of another than himself,

I have known a man vehement on both sides, that knew no mean either to intermit his studies or call upon them again. When he hath set himself to writing, he would join night to day, press upon himself without release, not minding it, till he fainted; and when he got off, resolve himself into all sports and looseness again, that it was almost a despair to draw him to his book; but once got to it, he grew stronger and more earnest by the ease. His whole powers were renewed: he would work out of himself what he desired; but with such excess, as is study could not be ruled: he knew not how to dispose his own abilities or husband them, he was of that immoderate power against himself. Nor was he only a strong but an absolute speaker and writer; but his subtlety did not show itself; his judgment thought that a vice: for the ambush hurts more that is hid. He never forced his language, nor went out of the highway of speaking, but for some great necessity, or apparent profit: for he denied figures to be invented for ornament, but for aid: and still thought it an extreme madness to bend or wrest that which ought to be right.

If any reader should think such a mixture of critical self-examination and complacent self-glorification impossible to any man of indisputable genius and of general good sense, that reader is not yet 'sealed of the tribe of Ben'; he has not arrived at a due appreciation of the writer's general strength and particular weakness as a critic and a workman, an artist and a thinker.

The note on famous orators is remarkable for its keen discrimination and appreciation of various talents; and the subsequent analysis or definition of Bacon's great gifts as a speaker, which has been often enough quoted to dispense with any fresh citation, is only less fine than the magnificent tribute paid a little further on to the same great man in his days of adversity. It may well be questioned whether there exists a finer example of English prose than the latter famous passage; where sublimity is resolved into pathos, and pathos dilates into sublimity. His idealism of monarchy, however irrational it may seem to us, has a finer side to it than belongs to the blind superstition of such a royalist as Fletcher. Witness this striking and touching interpretation of an old metaphor: Why are prayers said with Orpheus to be the daughters of Jupiter, but that princes are thereby admonished that the petitions of the wretched ought to have more weight with them than the laws themselves?' And the following note gives a better and a kindlier impression of King James I. than anything else—as far as I know—recorded of that singular sovereign.

It was a great accumulation to his majesty's deserved praise, that men might openly visit and pity those whom his greatest prisons had at any time received, or his laws condemned.

The note on 'the attribute of a prince' is rather Baconian than Jonsonian in its cult of 'prudence' as 'his chief art and safety'; but the peculiar and practical humour of Jonson's observant and studious satire is well exemplified in his strictures on such theological controversialists as 'are like swaggerers in a tavern, that catch that which stands next them, the candlesticks or pots-turn everything into a weapon: ofttimes they fight blindfold, and both beat the air. The one milks a he-goat, the other holds under a sieve. Their arguments are as fluxive as liquor spilt upon a table, which with your finger you may drain as you will.' But the remarks on 'untimely boasting' are especially worth transcription, both for their own real excellence and for the unconscious but inexpressible drollery of such an utterance from the 'capacious mouth' which had so often and so loudly set forth under divers names and figures the claims and the merits of Ben Jonson.

Men that talk of their own benefits are not believed to talk of them because they have done them, but to have done them because they might talk of them. That which had been great if another had reported it of them vanisheth and is nothing if he that did it speak of it. For men, when they cannot destroy the deed, will yet be glad to take advantage of the boasting and lessen it.

We may hope that these wise and weighty words were not written without some regretful if not repentant reminiscence of sundry occasions on which this rule of conduct had been grossly and grievously transgressed by the writer, to his own inevitable damage and discomfiture.

The note on flattery and flatterers is as exalted in its austerity as trenchant in its scorn. And the following remark 'on human life' is the condensed or distilled essence of a noble satire or a powerful essay.

I have considered our whole life is like a play, wherein every man, forgetful of himself, is in travail with expression of another. Nay, we so insist in imitating others, as we cannot (when it is necessary) return to ourselves;

like children that imitate the vices of stammerers so long, till at last they become such; and make the habit to another nature, as it is never forgotten.

There is a noble enthusiasm for goodness in the phrase which avers that 'good men are the stars, the planets of the ages wherein they live, and illustrate the times.' After an enumeration of scriptural instances, the poet adds this commentary: 'These, sensual men thought mad, because they would not be partakers or practisers of their madness. But they, placed high on the top of all virtue, looked down on the stage of the world, and contemned the play of fortune. For though the most be players, some must be spectators.'

And there is a fine touch of grave and bitter humour in the discovery 'that a feigned familiarity in great ones is a note of certain usurpation on the less. For great and popular men feign themselves to be servants to others, to make those slaves to them. So the fisher provides bait for the trout, roach, dace, &c., that they may be food to him.'

But finer by far and far more memorable than this is the following commentary on the fact that the emperor whose 'voice was worthier a headsman than a head, when he wished the people of Rome had but one neck,' 'found (when he fell) they had many hands.'

A tyrant, how great and mighty soever he may seem to cowards and sluggards, is but one creature, one animal.

That sentence is worthy of Landor; and those who would reproach Ben Jonson with the extravagance of his monarchical doctrines or theories must admit that such royalism as is compatible with undisguised approval of regicide or tyrannicide might not irrationally be condoned by the sternest and most rigid of republicans.

The next eight notes or entries deal in a somewhat desultory fashion with the subject of government; and display, as might be expected, a very singular combination or confusion of obsolete sophistry and superstition with rational and liberal intelligence. He attacks Machiavelli repeatedly, but there is a distinct streak of what is usually understood as Machiavellism in the remark, for example, that when a prince governs his people 'so as they have still need of his administration (for that is his art) he shall ever make and hold them faithful.' In answer to Machiavelli's principle of cruelty by proxy, he pleads with great and simple force of eloquence against all principles of

cruelty whatever. Many noble passages might be quoted from this pleading; but only a few can here be selected from the third and fourth, the sixth and seventh, of the entries above mentioned; which may on the whole be considered, when all due reservation is made with regard to the monarchical principle or superstition, as composing altogether a concise and masterly essay on the art and the principles of wise and righteous government.

Many punishments sometimes and in some cases as much discredit a prince as many funerals a physician. The state of things is secured by clemency: severity represseth a few, but irritates more. The lopping of trees makes the boughs shoot out thicker; and the taking away of some kind of enemies increaseth the number. It is then most gracious in a prince to pardon, when many about him would make him cruel; to think then how much he can save, when others tell him how much he can destroy; not to consider what the impotence of others hath demolished, but what his own greatness can sustain. These are a prince's virtues: and they that give him other counsels are but the hangman's factors.

But princes, by hearkening to cruel counsels, become in time obnoxious to the authors, their flatterers and ministers; and are brought to that, that when they would they dare not change them; they must go on, and defend cruelty with cruelty; they cannot alter the habit. It is then grown necessary they must be as ill as those have made them: and in the end they will grow more hateful to themselves than to their subjects. Whereas, on the contrary, the merciful prince is safe in love, not in fear. He needs no emissaries, spies, intelligencers, to entrap true subjects. He fears no libels, no treasons. His people speak what they think, and talk openly what they do in secret. They have nothing in their breasts that they need a cipher for. He is guarded with his own benefits.

There is nothing with some princes sacred above their majesty; or profane, but what violates their sceptres. But a prince with such a council [qu. counsel?] is like the god Terminus of stone, his own landmark; or (as it is in the fable) a crowned lion. . . . No men hate an evil prince more than they that helped to make him such. And none more boastingly weep his ruin than they that procured and practised it. The same path leads to ruin which did to rule, when men profess a license in government. A good king is a public servant.

A prince without letters is a pilot without eyes. All his government is groping. In sovereignty it is a most happy thing not to be compelled; but so it is the most miserable not to be counselled. And how can he be counselled that cannot see to read the best counsellors, which are books; for they neither flatter us nor hide from us? He may hear, you will say; but how shall he always be sure to hear truth? or be counselled the best things, not the sweetest? They say princes learn no art truly but the art of horsemanship. The reason is, the brave

beast is no flatterer. He will throw a prince as soon as his groom. Which is an argument that the good counsellors to princes are the best instruments of a good age. For though the prince himself be of most prompt inclination to all virtue, yet the best pilots have need of mariners, besides sails, anchor, and other tackle.

It must be admitted that the royalism of this laureate is sufficiently tempered and allayed with rational or republican good sense to excite in the reader's mind a certain curiosity of conjecture as to the effect which might or which must have been produced on his royal patrons by the publication of opinions so irreconcilable with the tragically comic form of idolatry embodied in the heroes and expressed in the rhapsodies of Beaumont and Fletcher. Amintor and Aëcius, Archas and Aubrey, are figures or types of unnatural heroism or preposterous devotion which are obviously and essentially wellnigh as far from Jonson's ideal of manhood and of duty as from Shakespeare's.

There is a quaint fierce touch of humour in the reflection that 'he which is sole heir to many rich men, having (beside his father's and uncle's) the estates of divers his kindred come to him by accession, must needs be richer than father or grandfather: so they which are left heirs ex asse' (sole

heirs) 'of all their ancestor's vices, and by their good husbandry improve the old, and daily purchase new, must needs be wealthier in vice, and have a greater revenue or stock of ill to spend on.' But this is only one in a score of instances which might be quoted to show that if a great English poet and humourist had left nothing behind him but this little book of 'maxims,' as the French call them-notes, observations, or reflections cast in a form more familiar to French than to English writers--he would still hold a place beside or above La Rochefoucauld, and beside if not above Chamfort. And yet, even among his countrymen, it may be feared that the sardonic wit and the cynical wisdom of the brilliant French patrician and the splendid French plebeian are familiar to many who have never cared to investigate the Discoveries of Ben Jonson.

Again we meet the strangely outspoken satirist and malcontent in the person of the court laureate who allowed himself to remark that 'the great thieves of a state are lightly' [usually or naturally] 'the officers of the crown: they hang the less still, play the pikes in the pond, eat whom they list. The net was never spread for the hawk or buzzard that hurt us, but the harmless birds; they are good

meat.' But the critic of state consoles himself with a reflection on the precarious tenure of their powers enjoyed by such tenants or delegates of tyranny, and cites against them a well-known witticism of that great practical humourist King Louis XI.

The partially autobiographic or personal note which follows this opens and closes at once nobly and simply.

A good man will avoid the spot of any sin. The very aspersion is grievous; which makes him choose his way in his life, as he would in his journey. The ill man rides through all confidently; he is coated and booted for it. The oftener he offends, the more openly; and the fouler, the fitter in fashion. His modesty, like a riding-coat, the more it is worn, is the less cared for. It is good enough for the dirt still, and the ways he travels on.

No one will be surprised to find that Ben Jonson's chosen type or example of high-minded innocence, incessantly pursued by malice, delated and defamed, but always triumphant and confident, even when driven to the verge of a precipice, is none other than Ben Jonson. His accusers were 'great ones'; but they 'were driven, for want of crimes, to use invention, which was found slander; or too late (being entered so far) to seek starting-holes for their rashness, which were not given them.'

His profession also, as well as his person, was attacked: 'they objected making of verses to me when I could object to most of them their not being able to read them but as worthy of scorn; and strove, after the changeless manner of their estimable kind, to back and bolster up their accusations and objections by falsified and garbled extracts, 'which was an excellent way of malice; as if any man's context might not seem dangerous and offensive, if that which was knit to what went before were defrauded of his beginning; or that things by themselves uttered might not seem subject to calumny, which read entire would appear most free.' So little difference is there, in the composition of the meanest and foolishest among literary parasites and backbiters, between the characteristic developments or the representative products of the seventeenth and the nineteenth century.

At last they would object to me my poverty: I confess she is my domestic; sober of diet, simple of habit, frugal, painful, a good counsellor to me, that keeps me from cruelty, pride, or other more delicate impertinences, which are the nurse-children of riches.

All 'great and monstrous wickednesses,' avers the Laureate—not perhaps without an implied reference to such hideous instances as the case of Somerset and Overbury,—'are the issue of the wealthy giants and the mighty hunters: whereas no great work, or worthy of praise or memory, but came out of poor cradles. It was the ancient poverty that founded commonweals, built cities, invented arts, made wholesome laws, armed men against vices, rewarded them with their own virtues, and preserved the honour and state of nations, till they betrayed themselves to riches.'

It is hardly too much to say that there are few finer passages than that in Landor; in other words, that there can be few passages as fine in any third writer of English prose.

The fierce and severe attack on worldliness and love of money which follows this noble panegyric on the virtues of poverty should be read as part of the same essay rather than as a separate note or reflection. Indeed, throughout the latter part of the *Discoveries*, it is obvious that we have before us the fragments, disunited and disjointed, of single and continuous essays on various great subjects, rather than the finished and coherent works which their author would have offered to his readers had he lived long enough in health and strength of spirit and of body to carry out his original design. This sermon against greed of all kinds—avarice, luxury,

ambition of state and magnificence of expenditure—is full of lofty wisdom and of memorable eloquence.

What a wretchedness is this, to thrust all our riches outward, and be beggars within; to contemplate nothing but the little, vile, and sordid things of the world: not the great, noble, and precious? We serve our avarice; and not content with the good of the earth that is offered us, we search and dig for the evil that is hidden. God offered us those things, and placed them at hand and near us, that he knew were profitable for us; but the hurtful he laid deep and hid. Yet do we covet only the things whereby we may perish; and bring them forth, when God and nature hath buried them. We covet superfluous things, when it were more honour for us if we could contemn necessary.

A little further on, the Laureate who had lavished the wealth of his poetic invention and his scenic ingenuity on the festivities which welcomed the Danish king to the court of his brother-in-law refers in the following terms of sorrowful and sarcastic reminiscence to those splendid and sterile extravagances of meaningless magnificence.

Have I not seen the pomp of a whole kingdom, and what a foreign king could bring hither? all 1 to make

¹ The current text reads 'Also'! My emendation at all events makes sense of a fine passage.

himself gazed and wondered at, laid forth as it were to the show—and vanish all away in a day. And shall that which could not fill the expectation of few hours entertain and take up our whole lives? when even it appeared as superfluous to the possessors as to me that was a spectator. The bravery was shown, it was not possessed: while it boasted itself, it perished. It is vile, and a poor thing, to place our happiness on these desires. Say we wanted them all. Famine ends famine.

These reflections are uncourtly enough from the hand of a courtly poet; but they are tame and tender if compared with his animadversions on 'vice and deformity,' which 'we may behold—so much the fouler in having all the splendour of riches to gild them, or the false light of honour and power to help them. Yet this is that wherewith the world is taken, and runs mad to gaze on: clothes and titles, the birdlime of fools.'

No man ever made more generous response to the friendly or generous kindness of others than Ben Jonson: no man had ever less disposition or inclination towards the grudging mood of mind which regrets or the abject mood of mind which resents the acceptance of a benefit. For all that he received of help or support from his wealthier friends or patrons he returned the noblest and most liberal payment in manly and self-respectful gratitude: he did not, like the rival poets of the restored Stuarts, condescend to undertake the deification or glorification of a male or female prostitute of parliament or of court: but it must be admitted that the outpourings of his heart in thanks and praises may seem somewhat excessive even to those who bear in mind that the tribute of his cordial homage was by no means confined to kings and princes, lords and ladies. But that 'he would not flatter Neptune for his trident or Jove for his power to thunder'—that he would not speak well, that he could hardly forbear from speaking evil, of any whom he found or whom he held to be undeserving—is as certain as that no loftier scorn than breathes through the words above transcribed was ever expressed by the most democratic or sarcastic of republicans for the mere attributes of rank and power. This fierce and deep contempt informs with even more vehement eloquence the note which follows.

What petty things they are we wonder at! like children, that esteem every trifle, and prefer a fairing before their fathers; what difference is betwixt us and them, but that we are dearer fools, coxcombs at a higher rate? . . . All that we call happiness is mere painting and gilt; and all for money: what a thin membrane of honour that is! and how hath all true reputation fallen, since money

began to have any! Yet the great herd, the multitude, that in all other things are divided, in this alone conspire and agree; to love money. They wish for it, they embrace it, they adore it: while yet it is possest with greater stir and torment than it was gotten.

The pure and lofty wisdom of the next note is worthy of Epictetus or Aurelius.

Some men, what losses soever they have, they make them greater: and if they have none, even all that is not gotten is a loss. Can there be creatures of more wretched condition than these, that continually labour under their own misery and others' envy? A man should study other things: not to covet, not to fear, not to repent him: to make his base such as no tempest shall shake him: to be secure of all opinion, and pleasing to himself, even for that wherein he displeases others: for the worst opinion, gotten for doing well, should delight us. Wouldst not thou be just but for fame, thou oughtest to be it with infamy: he that would have his virtue published is not the servant of virtue, but glory.

In the following satirical observation all students will recognize the creator of Fastidious Brisk—and rather, perhaps, the spirit of Macilente than of Asper.

A dejected countenance, and mean clothes, beget

¹ That is, the envy they bear towards others: an equivocal, awkward, and affected Latinism. The writer would not—he never would—remember that a phrase or a construction which makes very good Latin may make very bad English.

often a contempt, but it is with the shallowest creatures; courtiers commonly: look up even with them in a new suit, you get above them straight. Nothing is more short-lived than [? their] pride: it is but while their clothes last: stay but while these are worn out, you cannot wish the thing more wretched or dejected.

In the four notes which compose a brief essay on painting (or, as Jonson calls it, picture) the finest passage by far is this wise and noble word of tribute paid to another great art by a great artist in letters:—

Whosoever loves not picture is injurious to truth and all the wisdom of poetry. Picture is the invention of heaven, the most ancient, and most akin to nature. It is itself a silent work, and always of one and the same habit: yet it doth so enter and penetrate the inmost affection (being done by an excellent artificer) as sometimes it overcomes the power of speech and oratory.

The summary history of 'picture,' or the art of painting, in which Jonson has given us his views on the relation of that art to poetry, geometry, optics, and moral philosophy, bears no less witness to his wide reading and his painstaking attention than to his quaint and dogmatic self-confidence in laying down the law at second hand on subjects of which he seems to have known less than little. But when we pass from criticism of painters to the lower ground

of satirical observation—from the heights of a noble art to the depths or levels of ignoble nature, we meet once more the same fierce and earnest critic of life who should certainly be acknowledged as the greatest of all poets by any one—if any one there be—to whom 'criticism of life' seems acceptable or imaginable as a definition of the essence or the end of poetry.

The opening of the satirical essay on parasites which is here divided or split up into two sections by the blundering negligence and the unprincipled incompetence of its editors has the force and the point of a keen and heavy weapon, edged with wit and weighted with indignation. Juvenal has hardly left us a more vivid likeness of the creatures who 'grow suspected of the master, hated of the servants, while they inquire, and reprehend, and compound, and delate business of the house they have nothing to do with.' This note ends with the admirable remark, 'I know not truly which is worse, he that maligns all or that praises all.' An eminent poet and dramatist of our own age, M. Auguste Vacquerie, has said much the same thing in words even more terse, accurate, and forcible than Jonson's:-- 'Louer tout, c'est une autre façon de dénigrer tout.'

What follows as part of the same note is a letter to a nobleman who had asked Jonson's advice as to the education of his sons, 'and especially to the advancement of their studies.' The kindly and practical wisdom of his counsel is 'not of an age, but for all time': indeed, it is in some points as far ahead of our own age as of the writer's. Though nature 'be proner in some children to some disciplines, yet are they naturally prompt to taste all by degrees, and with change. For change is a kind of refreshing in studies, and infuseth knowledge by way of recreation.' The old Westminster boy, who had paid such loval homage of gratitude to the 'most reverend head' of his old master, is as emphatic in his preference of public to private education as in his insistence that scholars 'should not be affrighted or deterred in their entry, but drawn on with exercise and emulation.' His illustrious namesake of the succeeding century was hardly more emphatic in his advocacy of the opposite principle. That which Samuel Johnson and Charles Kingsley considered as 'doubtless the best of all punishments' is denounced by Ben Jonson as energetically as by Quintilian: but I trust he would not have preferred to it the execrable modern substitute of torture by

transcription—the infernal and idiotic infliction of so many hundred lines to be written out by way of penance.

Would we did not spoil our own children, and overthrow their manners ourselves by too much indulgence! To breed them at home is to breed them in a shade; where in a school they have the light and heat of the sun. They are used and accustomed to things and men. When they come forth into the commonwealth, they find nothing new, or to seek. They have made their friendships and aids, some to last their age. They hear what is commanded to others as well as themselves. Much approved, much corrected; all which they bring to their own store and use, and learn as much as they hear. Eloquence would be but a poor thing if we did but converse with singulars-speak man and man together. Therefore I like no private breeding. I would send them where their industry should be daily increased by praise; and that kindled by emulation. It is a good thing to inflame the mind, and though ambition itself be a vice, it is often the cause of great virtue. Give me that wit whom praise excites, glory puts on, or disgrace grieves; he is to be nourished with ambition, pricked forward with honour, checked with reprehension, and never to be suspected of sloth. Though he be given to play, it is a sign of spirit and liveliness, so there be a mean had of their sports and relaxations.

If the nineteenth century has said anything on this subject as well worth hearing—as wise, as humane, as reasonable, as full of sympathy and of judgment—as these reflections and animadversions of a scholar living in the first half or quarter of the seventeenth, I have never chanced to meet with it.

The forty-eight notes or entries which complete the sum of Ben Jonson's Discoveries should be considered as composing an essay on style, continuous in aim though desultory in treatment. The cruel, stupid, and insolent neglect of his editors has left it in so disjointed and dislocated a condition that we can only read it as we might read so many stray notes jotted down irregularly at odd moments on the first sheet or scrap of paper which might have fallen under the fatigued and fitful hand of the venerable poet. The very last entry is a repetition of a former remark and a former quotation, tumbled in by some blundering printer's devil with no reference whatever to the sentence preceding it.1 As to the punctuation, let one example stand for many. 'Again, whether a man's genius is best able to reach thither, it should more and more contend, lift, and dilate itself.' To rectify this hopeless nonsense does not require the skill of a Bentley or a Porson. It is obvious that Jonson must have written 'whither a man's genius is best able to

¹ Compare lxxii., Not. 4, and clxxi.

reach, thither,' &c. But the moles and bats who have hitherto taken charge of this great writer's text could not see even so simple and glaring a fact as this.

It is natural that Jonson should insist with some excess of urgency on the necessity for care and labour in writing.

No matter how slow the style be at first, so it be laboured and accurate: seek the best, and be not glad of the froward conceits or first words that offer themselves to us; but judge of what we invent, and order what we approve. Repeat often what we have formerly written; which beside that it helps the consequence, and makes the juncture better, it quickens the heat of imagination, that often cools in the time of setting down, and gives it new strength, as if it grew lustier by the going back. As we see in the contention of leaping, they jump farthest that fetch their race largest; or as in throwing a dart or javelin we force back our arms to make our loose the stronger. Yet, if we have a fair gale of wind, I forbid not the steering out of our sail, so the favour of the gale deceive us not. For all that we invent doth please us in the conception or birth, else we would never set it down.

This extract is no exceptional example of the purity, force, and weight of style by which this essay is distinguished even among the works of its author. It is impossible for any commentator to

convey more than a most imperfect impression of its rich and various merits.

Great as was Jonson's reliance on the results of training and study, he never forgot that 'arts and precept avail nothing, except nature be beneficial and aiding. And therefore these things are no more written to a dull disposition than rules of husbandry to a barren soil. No precepts will profit a fool; no more than beauty will the blind, or music the deaf. As we should take care that our style in writing be neither dry nor empty, we should look again it be not winding, or wanton with far-fetched descriptions: either is a vice. But that is worse which proceeds out of want than that which riots out of plenty. The remedy of fruitfulness is easy, but no labour will help the contrary.'

Of Spenser, whom he seems to have liked no better than did Landor—in other words, no better than might have been expected of him,—he speaks here, on one point at least, in terms quite opposite to those recorded in Drummond's too sparing and irregular but delightful and invaluable notes. To the Scottish poet he said that 'Spenser's stanzas pleased him not, nor his matter': whereas in this later essay, while still

insisting that 'Spenser, in affecting the ancients, writ no language,' he adds, 'yet I would have him read for his matter, but as Virgil read Ennius.' In his preference of Plautus to Terence, it may be observed that Ben Jonson anticipated the verdict of two such very different great men as Jonathan Swift and Victor Hugo.

In the Greek poets, as also in Plautus, we shall see the economy and disposition of poems better observed than in Terence, and the latter [that is, in later comic dramatists], who thought the sole grace and virtue of their fable the sticking in of sentences, as ours do the forcing in of jests.

The Herculean energy and industry of Jonson might have been expected to make him as intolerant of indolence as he shows himself in the following fine passage:—

We should not protect our sloth with the patronage of difficulty. It is a false quarrel [querela, as the marginal title of this note expresses it] against nature, that she helps understanding but in a few, when the most part of mankind are inclined by her thither, if they would take the pains; no less than birds to fly, horses to run, &c.; which if they lose, it is through their own sluggishness, and by that means become her prodigies, not her children.

The whole of the section which opens with these noble and fervent words should be most carefully studied by those who would appreciate the peculiar character of Jonson's intelligence and genius. It may be doubted, even by those who would admit that we learn best what we learn earliest, whether 'nature in children is more patient of labour in study, than in age; for the sense of the pain, the labour of the judgment, is absent; they do not measure what they have done. And it is the thought and consideration that affects us, more than the weariness itself.' Plato. we are reminded, went first to Italy and afterwards to Egypt in pursuit of Pythagorean and Osirian mysteries. 'He laboured, so must we.' From the examples of musicians and preachers, whose work requires the service of many faculties at once, this lesson may be drawn:—'if we can express this variety together, why should not divers studies, at divers hours, delight, when the variety is able alone to refresh and repair us? As, when a man is weary of writing, to read; and then again of reading, to write. Wherein, howsoever we do many things, yet are we (in a sort) still fresh to what we begin; we are recreated with change, as the stomach is with meats. . . . It is easier to do

many things, and continue, than to do one thing long.'

'A fool may talk,' as Jonson observes a little further on, 'but a wise man speaks': and to such a man it will scarcely be questioned that we have been listening. But though 'it were a sluggish and base thing to despair' when the attainment of knowledge is possible, yet, 'if a man should prosecute as much as could be said of everything, his work would find no end.'

The next four notes deal more directly with special and practical details and principles of style. If some of the points insisted on seem either obsolete or obvious, there are others which cannot be too often asserted or too strenuously maintained. Silence may be golden on certain occasions; but it is none the less certain that 'speech is the only benefit man hath to express his excellency of mind above other creatures. Words are the people's, yet there is a choice of them to be made'; and the rules laid down for the limitation and regulation of this choice are as sound in principle as brilliant in expression. At every step we find something which might well be quoted in evidence of this.

A good man always profits by his endeavour, by his

help, yea, when he is absent, nay, when he is dead, by his example and memory. So good authors in their style: a strict and succinct style is that where you can take away nothing without loss, and that loss to be manifest.

The grace of metaphor in the following sentence is not more notable than the soundness of its counsel.

Some words are to be culled out for ornament and colour, as we gather flowers to strew houses, or make garlands; but they are better when they grow in our style; as in a meadow, where though the mere grass and greenness delight, yet the variety of flowers doth heighten and beautify.

No modern student of letters will read this without seeing in it an anticipatory tribute to the incomparable style of Mr. Ruskin.

All the definitions of different styles are good, but this is excellent:—

The congruent and harmonious fitting of parts in a sentence hath almost the fastening and force of knitting and connection; as in stones well squared, which will rise strong a great way without mortar.

The reader of the following extract will be reminded at its close of an ever-memorable deliverance recorded by Boswell.

Periods are beautiful, when they are not too long; for

so they have their strength too, as in a pike or javelin. As we must take the care that our words and sense be clear, so, if the obscurity happen through the hearer's or reader's want of understanding, I am not to answer for them, no more than for their not listening or marking; I must neither find them ears nor mind.

All must remember how the second great dictator of literary London who bore the name of Johnson expressed the same very rational objection:—'I have found you a reason, sir; I am not bound to find you an understanding.'

The following precept is of perennial value—and of perennial application.

We should therefore speak what we can the nearest way, so as we keep our gait, not leap; for too short may as well be not let into the memory, as too long not kept in. Whatsoever loseth the grace and clearness, converts into a riddle: the obscurity is marked, but not the value. That perisheth, and is passed by, like the pearl in the fable. Our style should be like a skein of silk, to be carried and found by the right thread, not ravelled and perplexed: then all is a knot, a heap.

Nor is this less weighty or less true:-

Language most shows a man. Speak, that I may see thee. It springs out of the most retired and inmost parts of us, and is the image of the parent of it, the mind. No glass renders a man's form or likeness so true as his speech. Nay, it is likened to a man: and as we consider feature and composition in a man, so words in language; in the greatness, aptness, sound, structure, and harmony of it.

The seven succeeding notes deal in more detail with various kinds of oratory; 'high and great,' 'grave, sinewy, and strong,' or 'humble and low,' 'plain and pleasing,' or 'vicious' and bombastic, 'fleshy, fat, and corpulent—full of suet and tallow,' or 'bony and sinewy.' These notes are as full of happy and humorous illustration as of sound and sensible criticism; but it is a matter of more interest to consider the observations of such a man as Jonson on such men as Bacon and Aristotle. His reflections on the mediæval worship of a name are not unworthy of modern consideration.

Nothing is more ridiculous than to make an author a dictator, as the schools have done Aristotle. The damage is infinite knowledge receives by it: for to many things a man should owe but a temporary relief and suspension of his own judgment, not an absolute resignation of himself, or a perpetual captivity. Let Aristotle and others have their dues; but if we can make farther discoveries of truth and fitness than they, why are we envied? Let us beware, while we strive to add, we do not diminish or deface; we may improve, but not augment. By discrediting falsehood, truth grows in request. We must not go about, like men anguished or perplexed, for vicious

affectation of praise; but calmly study the separation of opinions, find the errors have intervened, awake antiquity, call former times into question; but make no parties with the present, nor follow any fierce undertakers; mingle no matter of doubtful credit with the simplicity of truth, but gently stir the mould about the root of the question.

The remarks 'on epistolary style' are rich in humour and good sense, as well as curiously illustrative of the singular fashion of the time. 'Sometimes men make baseness of kindness,' observes the writer; and proceeds to illustrate the fact, in a manner which may remind us of Thackeray's, by examples of absurd and verbose adulation, expressed in phrases 'that go a-begging for some meaning, and labour to be delivered of the great burden of nothing.'

A word seems to have dropped out of the following admirable sentence; but the beetle-headed boobies to whose carelessness the charge of Jonson's posthumous writings was committed by the malignity of accident were incapable of noticing the nonsense they had made of it.

The next property of epistolary style is perspicuity, and is oftentimes [lost] by affectation of some wit ill angled for, or ostentation of some hidden terms of art. Few words they darken speech, and so do too many; as

well too much light hurteth the eyes as too little; and a long bill of chancery confounds the understanding as much as the shortest note; therefore let not your letters be penned like English statutes, and this is obtained.

Passing from the subjects of oratory and letter-writing to the subject of poetry, the Laureate at once falls foul of his personal assailants. 'The age is grown so tender of her fame, as she calls all writings aspersions. That is the state word, the phrase of court—Placentia College, which some call Parasites' Place, the Inn of Ignorance.' That is a tolerably harsh phrase for a wearer of courtly laurels to allow himself; but it is gentle and temperate compared with this effusion of divine wrath on the heads of victims now indiscernible and secure from fame or shame.

It sufficeth I know what kind of persons I displease; men bred in the declining and decay of virtue, betrothed to their own vices; that have abandoned or prostituted their good names; hungry and ambitious of infamy, invested in all deformity, enthralled to ignorance and malice, of a hidden and concealed malignity, and that hold a concomitancy with all evil.

The general and historical notes on poetry which follow are of less interest than they assuredly must have been if Jonson had given us

less of Aristotle, Cicero, and Horace, and more of himself. It is therefore less important to know what he thought of Euripides than to know what he thought of Aristotle.

But whatsoever nature at any time dictated to the most happy, or long exercise to the most laborious, that the wisdom and learning of Aristotle hath brought into an art; because he understood the causes of things: and what other men did by chance or custom, he doth by reason; and not only found out the way not to err, but the short way we should take not to err.

'To judge of poets,' says a later note, 'is only the faculty of poets; and not of all poets, but the best.' It is unlucky that in the note preceding it Ben Jonson should have committed himself to the assertion that Euripides, of all men, 'is sometimes peccant, as he is most times perfect.' The perfection of such shapeless and soulless abortions as the *Phænissae* and the *Hercules Furens* is about as demonstrable as the lack of art which Ben Jonson regretted and condemned in the author of *Hamlet* and *Othello*.

It is comically pathetic to find that the failure of Jonson's later comedies had led him to observe, with the judicious Aristotle, that 'the moving of laughter is a fault in comedy, a kind of turpitude that depraves some part of a man's nature without a disease': and likewise that 'this induced Plato to esteem of Homer as a sacrilegious person, because he presented the gods sometimes laughing.' But this deplorable and degrading instinct of perverse humanity becomes irrepressible and irresistible in the reader who discovers in the author of Bartholomew Fair and The Silent Woman so delicate and sensitive a dislike of plebeian horseplay and farcical scurrility that he cannot at any price abide the insolence and indecency of so vulgar a writer as Aristophanes.

The concluding essay on 'the magnitude and compass of any fable, epic or dramatic,' is of less interest, except to special students, than the animadversions of the writer on more particular subjects of criticism. Constant good sense, occasional felicity of expression, conscientious and logical intensity of application or devotion to every point of the subject handled or attempted, all readers will find, as all readers will expect: and it should be superfluous to repeat that they will find a text so corrupt and so confused as no editor of any but an English classic would venture to publish.

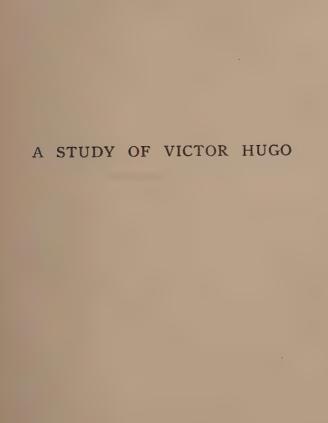
And now it must be evident that if Ben

Jonson was the author of Bacon's Essays—as that eminent Irish-American scholar, Dr. Athanasius Dogberry (of New Gotham, U.S.A.), maintains with a fervour not unworthy of Rabbi Zeal-of-the-Land Busy—his genius and his intelligence were by no means at their best when he produced that famous volume, and gave or sold it to his friend the Lord Chancellor. The full and fertile harvest of eloquence and thought, the condensed and compressed wealth of reflection and observation, overflowing on all sides from the narrow garner or treasury of the wonderful little book on which I have not hoped to write anything more than a most imperfect and inadequate commentary, may still be left unreaped and untreasured by the common cry of nominal students or lovers of English literature. But none who have studied it can fail to recognize that its author was in every way worthy to have been the friend of Bacon and of Shakespeare.











A STUDY

OF

VICTOR HUGO

BY

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

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PREFACE.

IF the title chosen for this book should be impeached on the score of inaccuracy and presumption, I must admit that it might not seem easy to confute the charge. A full and thorough study of the great master whose name is the crowning glory of the nineteenth century could scarcely be comprised in ten times the space here allotted to a rapid and imperfect survey of so sublime and inexhaustible a subject. My principal aim has been to bring into more prominent relief such aspects of the poet and the man as hitherto, for various worse or better reasons, have found least recognition or least acknowledgment in England. It is on this account, no less than on account of my own conscious inability to say anything unfamiliar to anybody in praise of his great romances, that only a few words have been given to works of world-wide fame, and of a popularity qualified only by the exceptional protests of malignant or obtuse eccentricity. Notre Dame de Paris and Les Misérables need little more introduction to foreign readers than to French: and as a dramatist Victor Hugo is probably far

better known abroad than as a lyric or elegiac or epic or satiric poet. I have no further excuse and no better explanation to offer for such various and serious shortcomings as will probably be detected in a work which at least lays no claim to completeness and makes no pretence to adequacy; but which, if it should ever be found serviceable as an introduction to the study of the greatest writer whom the world has seen since Shakespeare, will have fulfilled the utmost hope and realized the utmost ambition of its author.

THE WORK OF VICTOR HUGO.

In the spring of 1616 the greatest Englishman of all time passed away with no public homage or notice, and the first tributes paid to his memory were prefixed to the miserably garbled and inaccurate edition of his works which was issued seven years later by a brace of players under the patronage of a brace of peers. In the spring of 1885 the greatest Frenchman of all time has passed away amid such universal anguish and passion of regret as never before accompanied the death of the greatest among poets. The contrast is of course not wholly due to the incalculable progress of humanity during the two hundred and sixty-nine years which divide the date of our mourning from the date of Shakespeare's death: nor even to the vast superiority of Frenchmen to Englishmen in the quality of generous, just, and reasonable gratitude for the very highest of all benefits that man can confer on mankind. For the greatest poet of this century has been more than such a force of indirect and gradual beneficence as every great writer must needs be. His spiritual service has been in its inmost essence, in its highest development, the service of a healer and a comforter, the work of a redeemer and a prophet. Above all other apostles who have brought us each the glad tidings of his peculiar gospel, the free gifts of his special inspiration, has this one deserved to be called by the most beautiful and tender of all human titles—the son of consolation. His burning wrath and scorn unquenchable were fed with light and heat from the inexhaustible dayspring of his love—a fountain of everlasting and unconsuming fire. We know of no such great poet so good, of no such good man so great in genius: not though Milton and Shelley, our greatest lyric singer and our single epic poet, remain with us for signs and examples of devotion as heroic and self-sacrifice as pure. And therefore it is but simply reasonable that not those alone should mourn for him who have been reared and nurtured on the fruits of his creative spirit: that those also whom he wrought and fought for, but who know him only as their champion and their friend-they that cannot even read him, but remember how he laboured in their cause, that their children might fare otherwise than theyshould bear no unequal part in the burden of this infinite and worldwide sorrow.

For us, who from childhood upwards have fostered and fortified whatever of good was born in us—all capacity of spiritual work, all seed of human sympathy, all powers of hope and faith, all passions and aspirations found loyal to the service of duty and of love—with the bread of his deathless word and the wine of his immortal song, the one thing possible to do in this first hour of bitterness and stupefaction at the sense of a loss not possible yet to realize is not to declaim his praise or parade our lamentation in modulated effects or efforts of panegyric or of dirge: it is to reckon up once more the standing account of our all but incalculable debt. A brief and simple summary of his published works may probably lay before the student some points

and some details not generally familiar to the run of English readers: and I know not what better service might be done them than to bring into their sight such aspects of the most multiform and many-sided genius that ever wrought in prose or verse as are least obvious and least notorious to the foreign world of letters.

Poet, dramatist, novelist, historian, philosopher, and patriot, the spiritual sovereign of the nineteenth century was before all things and above all things a poet. Throughout all the various and ambitious attempts of his marvellous boyhood-criticism, drama, satire, elegy, epigram, and romance -the dominant vein is poetic. His example will stand for ever as the crowning disproof of the doubtless more than plausible opinion that the most amazing precocity of power is a sign of ensuing impotence and premature decay. There was never a more brilliant boy than Victor Hugo: but there has never been a greater man. At any other than a time of mourning it might be neither unseasonable nor unprofitable to observe that the boy's early verse, moulded on the models of the eighteenth century, is an arsenal of satire on revolutionary principles or notions which might suffice to furnish forth with more than their natural equipment of epigram a whole army of reactionary rhymesters and pamphleteers. But from the first, without knowing it, he was on the road to Damascus: if not to be struck down by sudden miracle, yet by no less inevitable a process to undergo a no less unquestionable conversion. At sixteen he wrote for a wager in the space of a fortnight the chivalrous and heroic story of Bug-Jargal; afterwards recast and reinformed with fresh vigour of vitality, when the author had attained the maturer age of twenty-three. His tenderness and manliness of spirit were here made nobly manifest: his originality and ardour of imagination, wild as yet and crude and violent, found vent two years later in Han d'Islande. But no boyish work on record ever showed more singular force of hand, more brilliant variety of power: though the author's criticism ten years later admits that 'il n'y a dans Han d'Islande qu'une chose sentie, l'amour du jeune homme; qu'une chose observée, l'amour de la jeune fille.' But as the work of a boy's fancy or invention, touched here and there with genuine humour, terror, and pathos, it is not less wonderful than are the author's first odes for ease and force and freshness and fluency of verse imbued with simple and sincere feeling, with cordial and candid faith. And in both these boyish stories the hand of a soldier's son, a child of the camp, reared in the lap of war and cradled in traditions of daring, is evident whenever an episode of martial adventure comes in among the more fantastic excursions of adolescent inventiveness. But it is in the ballads written between his twenty-second and his twenty-seventh year that Victor Hugo first showed himself, beyond all question and above all cavil, an original and a great poet. La Chasse du Burgrave and Le Pas d'Armes du Roi Jean would suffice of themselves to establish that. The fire, the music, the force, the tenderness, the spirit of these glorious little poems must needs, one would think, impress even such readers as might be impervious to the charm of their exquisitely vigorous and dexterous execution. Take for example this one stanza from the ballad last mentioned :--

> La cohue, Flot de fer, Frappe, hue, Remplit l'air,

Et, profonde, Tourne et gronde Comme une onde Sur la mer.

It will of course, I should hope, be understood once for all that when I venture to select for special mention any special poem of Hugo's I do not dream of venturing to suggest that others are not or may not be fully as worthy of homage, or that anything of this incomparable master's work will not requite our study or does not demand our admiration; I do but take leave to indicate in passing some of those which have been to me especially fruitful of enduring delight, and still are cherished in consequence with a peculiar gratitude.

At twenty-five the already celebrated lyric poet published his magnificent historic drama of Cromwell: a work sufficient of itself to establish the author's fame for all ages in which poetry and thought, passion and humour, subtle truth of character, stately perfection of structure, facile force of dialogue and splendid eloquence of style, continue to be admired and enjoyed. That the author has apparently confounded one earl of Rochester with another more famous bearer of the same title must not be allowed to interfere with the credit due to him for wide and various research. Any dullard can point the finger at a slip here and there in the history, a change or an error of detail or of date: it needs more care to appreciate the painstaking and ardent industry which has collected and fused together a great mass of historic and legendary material, the fervent energy of inspiration which has given life, order, and harmony to the vast and versatile design. As to the executive part of the poem, the least that can be said by any competent judge of that matter is that Molière was already equalled and Corneille was already excelled in their respective provinces of verse by the young conqueror whose rule was equal and imperial over every realm of song. The comic interludes or episodes of the second and third acts, so admirably welded into the structure or woven into the thread of the action, would suffice to prove this when collated with the seventeenth scene of the third act and the great speech of Cromwell in the fifth.

Arrêtez!

Que veut dire ceci? Pourquoi cette couronne? Que veut-on que j'en fasse? et qui donc me la donne? Est-ce un rêve? Est-ce bien le bandeau que je vois? De quel droit me vient-on confondre avec les rois? Qui mêle un tel scandale à nos pieuses fêtes? Quoi! leur couronne, à moi qui fais tomber leurs têtes! S'est-on mépris au but de ces solennités?-Milords, messieurs, anglais, frères, qui m'écoutez, Je ne viens point ici ceindre le diadème. Mais retremper mon titre au sein du peuple même, Rajeunir mon pouvoir, renouveler mes droits. L'écarlate sacrée était teinte deux fois. Cette pourpre est au peuple, et, d'une âme loyale, Te la tiens de lui.-Mais la couronne royale! Quand l'ai-je demandée? Et qui dit que j'en veux? Je ne donnerais pas un seul de mes cheveux, De ces cheveux blanchis à servir l'Angleterre, Pour tous les fleurons d'or des princes de la terre. Otez cela d'ici! Remportez, remportez Ce hochet, ridicule entre les vanités! N'attendez pas qu'aux pieds je foule ces misères! Qu'ils me connaissent mal, les hommes peu sincères Qui m'osent affronter jusqu'à me couronner! l'ai reçu de Dieu plus qu'ils ne peuvent donner, La grâce inamissible; et de moi je suis maître. Une fois fils du ciel, peut-on cesser de l'être?

De nos prospérités l'univers est jaloux. Que me faut-il de plus que le bonheur de tous? Je vous l'ai dit. Ce peuple est le peuple d'élite. L'Europe de cette île est l'humble satellite. Tout cède à notre étoile; et l'impie est maudit. Il semble, à voir cela, que le Seigneur ait dit : -Angleterre! grandis, et sois ma fille aînée. Entre les nations mes mains t'ont couronnée : Sois donc ma bien-aimée, et marche à mes côtés,-Il déroule sur nous d'abondantes bontés ; Chaque jour qui finit, chaque jour qui commence, Ajoute un anneau d'or à cette chaîne immense. On croirait que ce Dieu, terrible aux philistins, A comme un ouvrier composé nos destins; Que son bras, sur un axe indestructible aux âges, De ce vaste édifice a scellé les rouages, Œuvre mystérieuse, et dont ses longs efforts Pour des siècles peut-être ont monté les ressorts. Ainsi tout va. La roue, à la roue enchaînée, Mord de sa dent de fer la machine entraînée ; Les massifs balanciers, les antennes, les poids, Labyrinthe vivant, se meuvent à la fois ; L'effrayante machine accomplit sans relâche Sa marche inexorable et sa puissante tâche; Et des peuples entiers, pris dans ses mille bras, Disparaîtraient broyés, s'ils ne se rangeaient pas. Et j'entraverais Dieu, dont la loi salutaire Nous fait un sort à part dans le sort de la terre! l'irais, du peuple élu foulant le droit ancien, Mettre mon intérêt à la place du sien! Pilote, j'ouvrirais la voile aux vents contraires! (Hochant la tête.)

Non, je ne donne pas cette joie aux faux frères.
Le vieux navire anglais est toujours roi des flots.
Le colosse est debout. Que sont d'obscurs complots
Contre les hauts destins de la Grande-Bretagne?
Qu'est-ce qu'un coup de pioche aux flancs d'une montagne?
(Promenant des yeux de lynx autour de lui.)

Avis aux malveillants! on sait tout ce qu'ils font. Le flot est transparent, si l'abîme est profond. On voit le fond du piége où rampe leur pensée. La vipère parfois de son dard s'est blessée; Au feu qu'on allumait souvent on se brûla; Et les yeux du Seigneur vont courant cà et là.-Qui du peuple et des rois a signé le divorce? Moi.—Croit-on donc me prendre à cette vaine amorce? Un diadème !---Anglais, j'en brisais autrefois. Sans en avoir porté, j'en connais bien le poids. Quitter pour une cour le camp qui m'environne? Changer mon glaive en sceptre et mon casque en couronne? Allons! suis-je un enfant? me croit-on né d'hier? Ne sais-je pas que l'or pèse plus que le fer? M'édifier un trône! Eh! c'est creuser ma tombe. Cromwell, pour y monter, sait trop comme on en tombe. Et d'ailleurs, que d'ennuis s'amassent sur ces fronts Qui se rident sitôt, hérissés de fleurons! Chacun de ces fleurons cache une ardente épine La couronne les tue; un noir souci les mine; Elle change en tyran le mortel le plus doux, Et, pesant sur le roi, le fait peser sur tous. Le peuple les admire, et, s'abdiquant lui-même, Compte tous les rubis dont luit le diadème ; Mais comme il frémirait pour eux de leur fardeau. S'il regardait le front et non pas le bandeau! Eux, leur charge les trouble, et leurs mains souveraines De l'état chancelant mêlent bientôt les rênes.-Ah! remportez ce signe exécrable, odieux! Ce bandeau trop souvent tombe du front aux yeux.-(Larmoyant.)

Et qu'en ferais-je enfin? Mal né pour la puissance, Je suis simple de cœur et vis dans l'innocence. Si j'ai, la fronde en main, veillé sur le bercail, Si j'ai devant l'écueil pris place au gouvernail, J'ai dû me dévouer pour la cause commune. Mais que n'ai-je vieilli dans mon humble fortune!

Que n'ai-je vu tomber les tyrans aux abois, A l'ombre de mon chaume et de mon petit bois! Hélas! j'eusse aimé mieux ces champs où l'on respire, Le ciel m'en est témoin, que les soins de l'empire; Et Cromwell eût trouvé plus de charme cent fois A garder ses moutons qu'à détrôner des rois!

Oue parle-t-on de sceptre? Ah! j'ai mangué ma vie. Ce morceau de clinquant n'a rien qui me convie. Avez pitié de moi, frères, loin d'envier Votre vieux général, votre vieil Olivier. Je sens mon bras faiblir, et ma fin est prochaine. Depuis assez longtemps suis-je pas à la chaîne? Je suis vieux, je suis las ; je demande merci. N'est-il pas temps qu'enfin je me repose aussi? Chaque jour j'en appelle à la bonté divine, Et devant le Seigneur je frappe ma poitrine. Que je veuille être roi! Si frêle et tant d'orgueil! Ce projet, et j'en jure à côté du cercueil, Il m'est plus étranger, frères, que la lumière Du soleil à l'enfant dans le sein de sa mère! Loin ce nouveau pouvoir à mes vœux présenté! Je n'en accepte rien,-rien que l'hérédité.

The subtlety and variety of power displayed in the treatment of the chief character should be evident alike to those who look only on the upright side of it and those who can see only its more oblique aspect. The Cromwell of Hugo is as far from the faultless monster of Carlyle's creation and adoration as from the all but unredeemed villain of royalist and Hibernian tradition: he is a great and terrible poetic figure, imbued throughout with active life and harmonized throughout by imaginative intuition: a patriot and a tyrant, a dissembler and a believer, a practical humourist and a national hero.

The famous preface in which the batteries of pseudo-

classic tradition were stormed and shattered at a charge has itself long since become a classic. That the greatest poet was also the greatest prose-writer of his generation there could no longer be any doubt among men of any intelligence : but not even yet was more than half the greatness of his multitudinous force revealed. Two years later, at the age of twenty-seven, he published the superb and entrancing Orientales: the most musical and many-coloured volume of verse that ever had glorified the language. From Le Feu du Ciel to Sara la Baigneuse, from the thunder-peals of exterminating judgment to the flute-notes of innocent girlish luxury in the sense of loveliness and life, the inexhaustible range of his triumph expands and culminates and extends. Shelley has left us no more exquisite and miraculous piece of lyrical craftsmanship than Les Djinns; none perhaps so rich in variety of modulation, so perfect in rise and growth and relapse and reiterance of music.

> Murs, ville, Et port, Asile De mort, Mer grise Où brise La brise, Tout dort.

Dans la plaine
Naît un bruit.
C'est l'haleine
De la nuit.
Elle brame
Comme une âme
Qu'une flamme
Toujours suit.

Then the terrible music of the flight of evil spirits—'troupeau lourd et rapide'—grows as it were note by note and minute by minute up to its full height of tempest, and again relapses and recedes into the subsiding whisper of the corresponsive close.

Ce bruit vague Qui s'endort, C'est la vague Sur le bord; C'est la plainte Presque éteinte D'une sainte Pour un mort.

On doute
La nuit . . .
J'écoute :-Tout fuit,
Tout passe ;
L'espace
Efface
Le bruit.

And here, like Shelley, was Hugo already the poet of freedom, a champion of the sacred right and the holy duty of resistance. The husk of a royalist education, the crust of reactionary misconceptions, had already begun to drop off: not yet a pure republican, he was now ripe to receive and to understand the doctrine of human right, the conception of the common weal, as distinguished from imaginary duties and opposed to hereditary claims.

The twenty-eighth year of his life, which was illuminated by the issue of these passionate and radiant poems, witnessed also the opening of his generous and lifelong campaign or crusade against the principle of capital punishment. With all possible reverence and all possible reluctance, but remembering that without perfect straightforwardness and absolute sincerity I should be even unworthier than I am to speak of Victor Hugo at all, I must say that his reasoning on this subject seems to me insufficient and inconclusive: that his own radical principle, the absolute inviolability of human life, the absolute sinfulness of retributive bloodshedding, if not utterly illogical and untenable, is tenable or logical only on the ground assumed by those quaintest though not least pathetic among fanatics and heroes, the early disciples of George Fox. If a man tells you that supernatural revelation has forbidden him to take another man's life under all and any circumstances, he is above or beyond refutation: if he says that self-defence is justifiable, and that righteous warfare is a patriotic duty, but that to exact from the very worst of murderers, a parricide or a poisoner, a Philip the Second or a Napoleon the Third, the payment of a life for a life—or even of one infamous existence for whole hecatombs of innocent lives—is an offence against civilization and a sin against humanity, I am not merely unable to accept but incompetent to understand his argument. We may most heartily agree with him that France is degraded by the guillotine, and that England is disgraced by the gallows, and yet our abhorrence of these barbarous and nauseous brutalities may not preclude us from feeling that a dealer (for example) in professional infanticide by starvation might very properly be subjected to vivisection without anæsthetics, and that all manly and womanly minds not distorted or distracted by prepossessions or assumptions might rationally and laudably rejoice in the prospect of this legal and equitable process. 'The senseless old law of retaliation' (la vieille et inepte loi du talion) is inept or senseless only when the application of it is false to the principle: when justice in theory becomes unjust in practice. Another stale old principle or proverb-- 'abusus non tollit usum '-suffices to confute some of the arguments—I am very far from saying, all—adduced or alleged by the ardent eloquence of Victor Hugo in his admirable masterpiece of terrible and pathetic invention, Le dernier jour d'un condamné, and subsequently in the impressive little history of Claude Gueux, in the famous speech on behalf of Charles Hugo when impeached on a charge of insult to the laws in an article on the punishment of death, and in the fervent eloquence of his appeal on the case of a criminal executed in Guernsey, and of his protest addressed to Lord Palmerston against the horrible result of its rejection. That certain surviving methods of execution are execrable scandals to the country which maintains them, he has proved beyond all humane or reasonable question: and that all murderers are not alike inexcusable is no less indisputable a proposition: but beyond these two points the most earnest and exuberant advocacy can advance nothing likely to convince any but those already converted to the principle that human life must never be taken in punishment of crime—that there are not criminals whose existence insults humanity, and cries aloud on justice for mercy's very sake to cut it off.

The next year (1830) is famous for ever beyond all others in the history of French literature: it was the year of *Hernani*, the date of liberation and transfiguration for the tragic stage of France. The battle which raged round the first acted play of Hugo's and the triumph which crowned the struggles

of its champions, are not these things written in too many chronicles to be for the thousandth time related here? And of its dramatic and poetic quality what praise could be uttered that must not before this have been repeated at least some myriads of times? But if there be any mortal to whom the heroic scene of the portraits, the majestic and august monologue of Charles the Fifth at the tomb of Charles the Great, the terrible beauty, the vivid pathos, the bitter sweetness of the close, convey no sense of genius and utter no message of delight, we can only say that it would simply be natural, consistent, and proper for such a critic to recognize in Shakespeare a barbarian, and a Philistine in Milton.

Nevertheless, if we are to obey the perhaps rather childish impulse of preference and selection among the highest works of the highest among poets, I will avow that to my personal instinct or apprehension Marion de Lorme seems a yet more perfect and pathetic masterpiece than even Hernani itself. The always generous and loyal Dumas placed it at the very head of his friend's dramatic works. Written, as most readers (I presume) will remember, before its predecessor on the stage, it was prohibited on the insanely fatuous pretext that the presentation of King Louis the Thirteenth was an indirect affront to the majesty of King After that luckless dotard had been Charles the Tenth. driven off his throne, it was at once proposed to produce the hitherto interdicted play before an audience yet palpitating with the thrill of revolution and resentment. the chivalrous loyalty of Victor Hugo refused to accept a facile and factitious triumph at the expense of an exiled old man, over the ruins of a shattered old cause. The play was not permitted by its author to enter till the spring of 1831 15

the following year on its inevitable course of glory. It is a curious and memorable fact that the most tender-hearted of all great poets had originally made the hero of this tragedy leave the heroine unforgiven for the momentary and reluctant relapse into shame by which she had endeavoured to repurchase his forfeited life; and that Prosper Mérimée should have been the first, Marie Dorval the second, to reclaim a little mercy for the penitent. It is to their pleading that we owe the sublime pathos of the final parting between Marion and Didier.

In one point it seems to me that this immortal masterpiece may perhaps be reasonably placed, with *Le Roi s'amuse* and *Ruy Blas*, in triune supremacy at the head of Victor Hugo's plays. The wide range of poetic abilities, the harmonious variety of congregated powers, displayed in these three great tragedies through almost infinite variations of terror and pity and humour and sublime surprise, will seem to some readers, whose reverence is no less grateful for other gifts of the same great hand, unequalled at least till the advent in his eighty-first year of *Torquemada*.

Victor Hugo was not yet thirty when all these triumphs lay behind him. In the twenty-ninth year of a life which would seem fabulous and incredible in the record of its achievements if divided by lapse of time from all possible proof of its possibility by the attestation of dates and facts, he published in February Notre-Dame de Paris, in November Les Feuilles d'Automne: that the two dreariest months of the year might not only 'smell April and May,' but outshine July and August. The greatest of all tragic romances has a Grecian perfection of structure, with a Gothic intensity of pathos. To attempt the praise of such a work

would be only less idle than to refuse it. Terror and pity, with eternal fate for key-note to the strain of story, never struck deeper to men's hearts through more faultless evolution of combining circumstance on the tragic stage o Athens. Louis the Eleventh has been painted by many famous hands, but Hugo's presentation of him, as compared for example with Scott's, is as a portrait by Velasquez to a portrait by Vandyke. The style was a new revelation of the supreme capacities of human speech: the touch of it on any subject of description or of passion is as the touch of the sun for penetrating irradiation and vivid evocation of life.

From the Autumn Leaves to the Songs of the Twilight, and again from the Inner Voices to the Sunbeams and Shadows, the continuous jet of lyric song through a space of ten fertile years was so rich in serene and various beauty that the one thing notable in a flying review of its radiant course is the general equality of loveliness in form and colour, which is relieved and heightened at intervals by some especial example of a beauty more profound or more The first volume of the four, if I mistake not, sublime. won a more immediate and universal homage than the rest: its unsurpassed melody was so often the raiment of emotion which struck home to all hearts a sense of domestic tenderness too pure and sweet and simple for perfect expression by any less absolute and omnipotent lord of style, that it is no wonder if in many minds-many mothers' minds especially—there should at once have sprung up an all but ineradicable conviction that no subsequent verse must be allowed to equal or excel the volume which contained such flowerlike jewels of song as the nineteenth and twentieth of these unwithering and imperishable Leaves. But no error possible to a rational creature could be more serious or more complete than the assumption of any inferiority in the volume containing the two glorious poems addressed to Admiral Canaris, the friend (may I be forgiven the filial vanity or egotism which impels me to record it?) of the present writer's father in his youth; the two first in date of Hugo's finest satires, the lines that scourge a backbiter and the lines that brand a traitor (the resonant and radiant indignation of the latter stands unsurpassed in the very Châtiments themselves); the two most enchanting aubades or songs of sunrise that ever had outsung the birds and outsweetened the flowers of the dawn; and-for here I can cite no morethe closing tribute of lines more bright than the lilies whose name they bear, offered by a husband's love at the sweet still shrine of motherhood and wifehood. The first two stanzas of the second aubade are all that can here be quoted.

> L'aurore s'allume, L'ombre épaisse fuit; Le rêve et la brume Vont où va la nuit; Paupières et roses S'ouvrent demi-closes; Du réveil des choses On entend le bruit.

Tout chante et murmure, Tout parle à la fois, Fumée et verdure, Les nids et les toits; Le vent parle aux chênes, L'eau parle aux fontaines Toutes les haleines Deviennent des voix. And in each of the two succeeding volumes there is, among all their other things of price, a lyric which may even yet be ranked with the highest subsequent work of its author for purity of perfection, for height and fullness of note, for music and movement and informing spirit of life. We ought to have in English, but I fear—or rather I am only too sure—we have not, a song in which the sound of the sea is rendered as in that translation of the trumpet-blast of the night-wind, with all its wails and pauses and fluctuations and returns, done for once into human speech and interpreted into spiritual sense for ever. For instinctive mastery of its means and absolute attainment of its end, for majesty of living music and fidelity of sensitive imagination, there is no lyric poem in any language more wonderful or more delightful.

UNE NUIT QU'ON ENTENDAIT LA MER SANS LA VOIR.

Quels sont ces bruits sourds? Écoutez vers l'onde
Cette voix profonde
Qui pleure toujours
Et qui toujours gronde,
Quoiqu'un son plus clair
Parfois l'interrompe . . . —
Le vent de la mer
Souffle dans sa trompe.

Comme il pleut ce soir! N'est-ce pas, mon hôte? Là-bas, à la côte, Le ciel est bien noir, La mer est bien haute!

On dirait l'hiver;
Parfois on s'y trompe . . .—
Le vent de la mer
Souffle dans sa trompe.

Oh! marins perdus!
Au loin, dans cette ombre,
Sur la nef qui sombre,
Que de bras tendus
Vers la terre sombre!
Pas d'ancre de fer
Que le flot ne rompe.—
Le vent de la mer
Souffle dans sa trompe.

Nochers imprudents!
Le vent dans la voile
Déchire la toile
Comme avec les dents!
Là-haut pas d'étoile!
L'un lutte avec l'air,
L'autre est à la pompe.—
Le vent de la mer
Souffle dans sa trompe.

C'est toi, c'est ton feu
Que le nocher rêve,
Quand le flot s'élève,
Chandelier que Dieu
Pose sur la grève,
Phare au rouge éclair
Que la brume estompe!—
Le vent de la mer
Souffle dans sa trompe.

A yet sweeter and sadder and more magical sea-song there was yet to come years after—but only from the lips of an exile. Of the ballad—so to call it, if any term of definition may suffice—which stands out as a crowning splendour among Les Rayons et les Ombres, not even Hugo's own eloquence, had it been the work (which is impossible) of any other great poet in all time, could have said anything adequate at all. Not even Coleridge and Shelley, the sole twin sovereigns of English lyric poetry, could have produced this little piece of lyric work by combination and by fusion of their gifts. The pathetic truthfulness and the simple manfulness of the mountain shepherd's distraction and devotion might have been given in ruder phrase and tentative rendering by the nameless ballad-makers of the border: but here is a poem which unites something of the charm of Clerk Saunders and The Wife of Usher's Well with something of the magic of Christabel and the Ode to the West Wind: a thing, no doubt, impossible; but none the less obviously accomplished.1

¹ In the winter of the year which in spring had seen Les Rayons et les Ombres come forth to kindle and refresh the hearts of readers, Victor Hugo published an ode in the same key as those To the Column and To the Arch of Triumph, on the return and reinterment of the dead Napoleon. Full of noble feeling and sonorous eloquence, the place of this poem in any collection of its author's works is distinctly and unmistakably marked out by every quality it has and by every quality it wants. In style and in sentiment, in opinion and in rhythm, it is one with the national and political poems which had already been published by the author since the date of his Orientales: in other words, it is in every possible point utterly and absolutely unlike the poems long afterwards to be written by the author in exile. Its old place, therefore, in all former editions, at the end of the volume containing the poems previously published in the same year, is obviously the only right one, and rationally the only one possible. By what inexplicable and inconceivable caprice it has been promoted to a place, in the so-called édition définitive, on the mighty roll of the Légende des Siècles, at the head of the fourth volume of that crowning work of modern times, I am hopelessly and helplessly at a loss to conjecture. But, at all risk of impeachment on

The lyric work of these years would have been enough for the energy of another man, for the glory of another poet; it was but a part, it was (I had wellnigh said) the lesser part, of its author's labours—if labour be not an improper term for the successive or simultaneous expressions or effusions of his indefatigable spirit. The year after Notre-Dame de Paris and Les Feuilles d'Automne appeared one of the great crowning tragedies of all time, Le Roi s'amuse. As the key-note of Marion de Lorme had been redemption by expiation, so the key-note of this play is expiation by retribution. The simplicity, originality, and straightforwardness of the terrible means through which this austere conception is worked out would give moral and dramatic value to a work less rich in the tenderest and sublimest poetry, less imbued with the purest fire of pathetic passion. After the magnificent pleading of the Marquis de Nangis in the preceding play, it must have seemed impossible that the poet should without a touch of repetition or reiterance be able again to confront a young king with an old servant, pour forth again the denunciation and appeal of a breaking heart, clothe again the haughtiness of honour, the loyalty of grief, the sanctity of indignation, in words that shine like lightning and verses that thunder like the sea. But the veteran interceding for a nephew's life is a less tragic figure than he who comes to ask account for a daughter's honour. Hugo never merely repeats himself: his miraculous fertility and force of utterance were not more indefatigable and inexhaustible

a charge of unbecoming presumption, I must and do here enter my most earnest and strenuous protest against the claim of an edition to be in any sense final and unalterable, which rejects from among the *Châtiments* the poem on the death of Saint-Arnaud and admits into the Légende des Siècles the poem on the reinterment of Napoleon.

than the fountains of thought and emotion which fed that eloquence with fire.

In the seventh scene of the fourth act of *Marion de Lorme*, an old warrior of the days of Henri Quatre comes to plead with the son of his old comrade in arms for the life of his heir, condemned to death as a duellist by the edict of Richelieu.

LE MARQUIS DE NANGIS (se relevant).

Je dis qu'il est bien temps que vous y songiez, sire; Que le cardinal-duc a de sombres projets, Et qu'il boit le meilleur du sang de vos sujets. Votre père Henri, de mémoire royale, N'eût pas ainsi livré sa noblesse loyale; Il ne la frappait point sans y fort regarder; Et, bien gardé par elle, il la savait garder. Il savait qu'on peut faire avec des gens d'épées Quelque chose de mieux que des têtes coupées; Qu'ils sont bons à la guerre. Il ne l'ignorait point, Lui dont plus d'une balle a troué le pourpoint. Ce temps était le bon. J'en fus, et je l'honore. Un peu de seigneurie y palpitait encore. Jamais à des seigneurs un prêtre n'eût touché. On n'avait point alors de tête à bon marché. Sire! en des jours mauvais comme ceux où nous sommes Croyez un vieux, gardez un peu de gentilshommes. Vous en aurez besoin peut-être à votre tour. Hélas! vous gémirez peut-être quelque jour Que la place de Grève ait été si fêtée, Et que tant de seigneurs de bravoure indomptée. Vers qui se tourneront vos regrets envieux. Soient morts depuis longtemps qui ne seraient pas vieux! Car nous sommes tout chauds de la guerre civile. Et le tocsin d'hier gronde encor dans la ville. Soyez plus ménager des peines du bourreau. C'est lui qui doit garder son estoc au fourreau

Non pas vous. D'échafauds montrez-vous économe. Craignez d'avoir un jour à pleurer tel brave homme, Tel vaillant de grand cœur, dont, à l'heure qu'il est, Le squelette blanchit aux chaînes d'un gibet! Sire! le sang n'est pas une bonne rosée; Nulle moisson ne vient sur la Grève arrosée. Et le peuple des rois évite le balcon, Quand aux dépens du Louvre on peuple Montfaucon. Meurent les courtisans, s'il faut que leur voix aille Vous amuser, pendant que le bourreau travaille! Cette voix des flatteurs qui dit que tout est bon, Qu'après tout on est fils d'Henri Quatre, et Bourbon, Si haute qu'elle soit, ne couvre pas sans peine Le bruit sourd qu'en tombant fait une tête humaine. Te vous en donne avis, ne jouez pas ce jeu. Roi, qui serez un jour face à face avec Dieu. Donc, je vous dis, avant que rien ne s'accomplisse, Qu'à tout prendre il vaut mieux un combat qu'un supplice, Que ce n'est pas la joie et l'honneur des états De voir plus de besogne aux bourreaux qu'aux soldats, Que c'est un pasteur dur pour la France où vous êtes Qu'un prêtre qui se paye une dîme de têtes, Et que cet homme illustre entre les inhumains Oui touche à votre sceptre-a du sang à ses mains!

In the fifth scene of the first act of *Le Roi s'amuse*, an old nobleman whose life, forfeit on a charge of friendship or relationship with rebels, has been repurchased by his daughter from the king at the price of her honour, is insulted by the king's jester when he comes to speak with the king, and speaks thus, without a glance at the jester.

Une insulte de plus !—Vous, sire, écoutez-moi, Comme vous le devez, puisque vous êtes roi ! Vous m'avez fait un jour mener pieds nus en Grève ; Là, vous m'avez fait grâce, ainsi que dans un rêve, Et je vous ai béni, ne sachant en effet Ce qu'un roi cache au fond d'une grâce qu'il fait. Or, vous aviez caché ma honte dans la mienne.-Oui, sire, sans respect pour une race ancienne, Pour le sang de Poitiers, noble depuis mille ans, Tandis que, revenant de la Grève à pas lents, Je priais dans mon cœur le Dieu de la victoire Qu'il vous donnât mes jours de vie en jours de gloire, Vous, François de Valois, le soir du même jour, Sans crainte, sans pitié, sans pudeur, sans amour, Dans votre lit, tombeau de la vertu des femmes, Vous avez froidement, sous vos baisers infâmes, Terni, flétri, souillé, déshonoré, brisé Diane de Poitiers, comtesse de Brézé! Quoi! lorsque j'attendais l'arrêt qui me condamne, Tu courais donc au Louvre, ô ma chaste Diane! Et lui, ce roi sacré chevalier par Bayard, Jeune homme auquel il faut des plaisirs de vieillard, Pour quelques jours de plus dont Dieu seul sait le compte, Ton père sous ses pieds, te marchandait ta honte, Et cet affreux tréteau, chose horrible à penser! Ou'un matin le bourreau vint en Grève dresser, Avant la fin du jour devait être, ô misère! Ou le lit de la fille, ou l'échafaud du père! O Dieu! qui nous jugez, qu'avez-vous dit là-haut, Ouand vos regards ont vu, sur ce même échafaud. Se vautrer, triste et louche, et sanglante et souillée, La luxure royale en clémence habillée? Sire! en faisant cela, vous avez mal agi. Oue du sang d'un vieillard le pavé fût rougi, C'était bien. Ce vieillard, peut-être respectable, Le méritait, étant de ceux du connétable, Mais que pour le vieillard vous ayez pris l'enfant, Que vous ayez broyé sous un pied triomphant La pauvre femme en pleurs, à s'effrayer trop prompte, C'est une chose impie, et dont vous rendrez compte! Vous avez dépassé votre droit d'un grand pas. Le père était à vous, mais la fille non pas.

Ah! vous m'avez fait grâce !--Ah! vous nommez la chose Une grâce! et je suis un ingrat, je suppose! -Sire, au lieu d'abuser ma fille, bien plutôt Que n'êtes-vous venu vous-même en mon cachot! Je vous aurais crié :- Faites-moi mourir! grâce! Oh! grâce pour ma fille, et grâce pour ma race! Oh! faites-moi mourir! la tombe, et non l'affront! Pas de tête plutôt qu'une souillure au front! Oh! monseigneur le roi, puisqu'ainsi l'on vous nomme, Croyez-vous qu'un chrétien, un comte, un gentilhomme, Soit moins décapité, répondez, monseigneur, Ouand au lieu de la tête il lui manque l'honneur? - J'aurais dit cela, sire, et le soir, dans l'église, Dans mon cercueil sanglant baisant ma barbe grise, Ma Diane au cœur pur, ma fille au front sacré, Honorée, eût prié pour son père honoré! -Sire, je ne viens pas redemander ma fille. Ouand on n'a plus d'honneur, on n'a plus de famille. Ou'elle vous aime ou non d'un amour insensé, Je n'ai rien à reprendre où la honte a passé. Gardez-la.—Seulement je me suis mis en tête De venir vous troubler ainsi dans chaque fête. Et jusqu'à ce qu'un père, un frère, ou quelque époux, -La chose arrivera,-nous ait vengés de vous, Pâle, à tous vos banquets, je reviendrai vous dire : -Vous avez mal agi, vous avez mal fait, sire !-Et vous m'écouterez, et votre front terni Ne se relèvera que quand j'aurai fini. Vous voudrez, pour forcer ma vengeance à se taire, Me rendre au bourreau. Non. Vous ne l'oserez faire, De peur que ce ne soit mon spectre qui demain (Montrant sa tête) Revienne vous parler,-cette tête à la main!

Marion de Lorme had been prohibited by Charles the Tenth for an imaginary reflection on Charles the Tenth; Le Roi s'amuse was prohibited by Louis-Philippe the First

-and Last-for an imaginary reflection on Citizen Philippe Egalité. Victor Hugo vindicated his meaning and reclaimed his rights in a most eloquent, most manly, and most unanswerable speech before a tribunal which durst not and could not but refuse him justice. Early in the following year he brought out the first of his three tragedies in prose—in a prose which even the most loyal lovers of poetry, Théophile Gautier at their head, acknowledged on trial to be as good as verse. And assuredly it would be, if any prose ever could: which yet I must confess that I for one can never really feel to be possible. Lucrèce Borgia, the first-born of these three, is also the most perfect in structure as well as the most sublime in subject. The plots of all three are equally pure inventions of tragic fancy: Gennaro and Fabiano, the heroic son of the Borgia and the caitiff lover of the Tudor, are of course as utterly unknown to history as is the self-devotion of the actress Tisbe. It is more important to remark and more useful to remember that the mastery of terror and pity, the command of all passions and all powers that may subserve the purpose of tragedy, is equally triumphant and infallible in them all. Lucrèce Borgia and Marie Tudor appeared respectively in February and in November of the year 1833; Angelo, two years later: and the year after this the exquisite and melodious libretto of La Esmeralda, which should be carefully and lovingly studied by all who would appreciate the all but superhuman versatility and dexterity of metrical accomplishment which would have sufficed to make a lesser poet famous among his peers for ever, but may almost escape notice in the splendour of Victor Hugo's other and sublimer qualities. In his thirty-seventh year all these blazed out once more together

in the tragedy sometimes apparently rated as his master-work by judges whose verdict would on any such question be worthy at least of all considerate respect. No one that I know of has ever been absurd enough to make identity in tone of thought or feeling, in quality of spirit or of style, the ground for a comparison of Hugo with Shakespeare: they are of course as widely different as are their respective countries and their respective times: but never since the death of Shakespeare had there been so perfect and harmonious a fusion of the highest comedy with the deepest tragedy as in the five many-voiced and many-coloured acts of *Ruy Blas*.

At the age of forty Victor Hugo gave to the stage which for thirteen years had been glorified by his genius the last work he was ever to write for it. There may perhaps be other readers besides myself who take even more delight in Les Burgraves than in some of the preceding plays which had been more regular in action, more plausible in story, less open to the magnificent reproach of being too good for the stage—as the Hamlet which came finally from the recasting hand of Shakespeare was found to be, in the judgment even of Shakespeare's fellows; too rich in lyric beauty, too superb in epic state. The previous year had seen the publication of the marvellously eloquent, copious, and vivid letters which gave to the world the impressions received by its greatest poet in a tour on the Rhine made five years earlier—that is, in the year of Ruy Blas. In this book, as Gautier at once observed, the inspiration of Les Burgraves is evidently and easily traceable. Among numberless masterpieces of description, from which I have barely time to select for mention the view of Bishop Hatto's tower by the appropriately Dantesque light of a furnace at midnight-not as better than others, but as an example of the magic by which the writer imbues and impregnates observation and recollection with feeling and with fancy—the most enchanting legend of enchantment ever written for children of all ages, sweet and strange enough to have grown up among the fairy tales of the past whose only known authors are the winds and suns of their various climates, lurks like a flower in a crevice of a crumbling fortress. The entrancing and haunting beauty of Régina's words as she watches the departing swallows-words which it may seem that any one might have said, but to which none other could have given the accent and the effect that Hugo has thrown into the simple sound of them-was as surely derived, we cannot but think, from some such milder and brighter vision of the remembered Rhineland solitudes, as were the sublime and all but Æschylean imprecations of Guanhumara from the impression of their darker and more savage memories or landscapes.

OTBERT (lui montrant la fenêtre).

Voyez ce beau soleil!

RÉGINA.

Oui, le couchant s'enflamme.

Nous sommes en automne et nous sommes au soir.

OTBERT.

Les feuilles renaîtront.

RÉGINA.

Oni.

(Rêvant et regardant le ciel)

Vite! à tire-d'ailes !--

-Oh! c'est triste de voir s'enfuir les hirondelles!-Elles s'en vont là-bas, vers le midi doré. OTBERT.

Elles reviendront.

RÉGINA.

Oui.—Mais moi je ne verrai Ni l'oiseau revenir ni la feuille renaître!

Two years before the appearance of Les Burgraves Victor Hugo had begun his long and glorious career as an orator by a speech of characteristically generous enthusiasm, delivered on his reception into the Academy. The forgotten playwright and versifier whom he succeeded had been a professional if not a personal enemy: the one memorable thing about the man was his high-minded opposition to the tyranny of Napoleon, his own personal friend before the epoch of that tyranny began: and this was the point at once seized and dwelt on by the orator in a tone of earnest and cordial respect. The fiery and rapturous eloquence with which at the same time he celebrated the martial triumphs of the empire gave ample proof that he was now, as his father had prophesied that his mother's royalist boy would become when he grew to be a man, a convert to the views of that father, a distinguished though ill-requited soldier of the empire, and a faithful champion or mourner of its cause. The stage of Napoleonic hero-worship, single-minded and single-eyed if short-sighted and misdirected, through which Victor Hugo was still passing on towards the unseen prospect of a better faith, had been vividly illustrated and vehemently proclaimed in his letters on the Rhine, and was hereafter to be described with a fervent and pathetic fidelity in a famous chapter of Les Misérables. The same phase of patriotic prepossession inspired his no less generous tribute to the

not very radiant memory of Casimir Delavigne, to whom he paid likewise the last and crowning honour of a funeral oration: an honour afterwards conferred on Frédéric Soulié, and far more deservedly bestowed on Honoré de Balzac. More generous his first political speech in the chamber of peers could not be, but there was more of reason and justice in its fruitless appeal for more than barren sympathy, for a moral though not material intervention, on behalf of Poland in 1846. His second speech as a peer is an edifying commentary on the vulgar English view of his character as defective in all the practical and rational qualities of a politician, a statesman, or a patriot. The subject was the consolidation and defence of the French coast-line: a poet, of course. according to all reasonable tradition, if he ventured to open his unserviceable lips at all on such a grave matter of public business, ought to have remembered what was expected of him by the sagacity of blockheads, and carefully confined himself to the clouds, leaving facts to take care of themselves and proofs to hang floating in the air, while his vague and verbose declamation wandered at its own sweet will about and about the matter in hand, and never came close enough to grapple it. This, I regret to say, is exactly what the greatest poet of his age was inconsiderate enough to avoid. and most markedly to abstain from doing; a course of conduct which can only be attributed to his notorious and deplorable love of paradox. His speech, though not wanting in eloquence of a reserved and masculine order, was wholly occupied with sedate and business-like exposition of facts and suggestion of remedies, grounded on experience and study of the question, and resulting in a proposal at once scientific and direct or such research as might result

if possible in an arrest of the double danger with which the coast was threatened by the advance of the Atlantic and the Channel to a gradual obstruction of the great harbours and by the withdrawal or subsidence of the Mediterranean from the sea-ports of the south; finally, the orator urged upon his audience as a crowning necessity the creation of fresh harbours of refuge in dangerous and neglected parts of the coast; insisting, with a simple and serious energy somewhat unlike the imaginary tone of the typical or traditional poet, on the plain fact that ninety-two ships had been lost on the same part of the coast within a space of seven years, which might have been saved by the existence of a harbour of refuge. To an Olympian or a Nephelococcygian intelligence such a paltry matter should have been even more indifferent than the claim of a family of exiles on the compassion of the country which had expelled them. To my own more humble and homely understanding it seems that there are not many more significant or memorable facts on record in the history of our age than this: that Victor Hugo was the advocate whose pleading brought back to France the banished race of which the future representative was for upwards of twenty vears to keep him in banishment from France. On the evening of the same day on which the house of peers had listened to his speech in behalf of the Bonaparte family, Louis-Philippe, having taken cognizance of it, expressed his intention to authorize the return of the brood whose chief was hereafter to pick the pockets of his children. In the first fortnight of the following year the future author of the terrible Vision of Dante saluted in words full of noble and fervent reverence the apostle of Italian resurrection and Italian unity in the radiant figure of Pope Pius the Ninth. When the next month's revolution had flung Louis-Philippe from his throne, Victor Hugo declined to offer himself to the electors as a candidate for a seat in the assembly about to undertake the charge of framing a constitution for the commonwealth; but, if summoned by his fellow-citizens to take his share of this task, he expressed himself ready to discharge the duty so imposed on him with the disinterested self-devotion of which his whole future career was to give such continuous and such austere evidence. From the day on which sixty thousand voices summoned him to redeem this pledge, he never stinted nor slackened his efforts to fulfil the charge he had accepted in the closing words of a short, simple, and earnest address, in which he placed before his electors the contrasted likenesses of two different republics; one, misnamed a commonweal, the rule of the red flag, of barbarism and blindness, communism and proscription and revenge; the other a commonwealth indeed, in which all rights should be respected and no duties evaded or ignored; a government of justice and mercy, of practicable principles and equitable freedom, of no iniquitous traditions and no utopian aims. To establish this kind of commonwealth and prevent the resurrection of the other, Hugo, at the age of forty-six, professed himself ready to devote his life. The work of thirty-seven years is now before all men's eyes for proof how well this promise has been kept. On dangerous questions of perverse or perverted socialism (June 20, 1848), on the freedom of the press, on the state of siege, its temporary necessity and its imminent abuse, on the encouragement of letters and the freedom of the stage, he spoke, in the course of a few

months, with what seems to my poor understanding the most admirable good sense and temperance, the most perfect moderation and loyalty I venture to dwell upon this division of Hugo's life and labours with as little wish of converting as I could have hope to convert that large majority whose verdict has established as a law of nature the fact or the doctrine that 'every poet is a fool' when he meddles with practical politics; but not without a confidence grounded on no superficial study that the maintainers of this opinion, if they wish to cite in support of it the evidence supplied by Victor Hugo's political career, will do well to persevere in the course which I will do them the justice to admit that—as far as I know—they have always hitherto adopted; in other words, to assume the universal assent of all persons worth mentioning to the accuracy of this previous assumption, and dismiss with a quiet smile or an open sneer the impossible notion that any one but some single imbecile or eccentric can pretend to take seriously what seems to them ridiculous, or to think that ridiculous which to their wiser minds commends itself as serious. This beaten road of assumption, this well-worn highway of assertion, is a safe as well as a simple line of travel: and the practical person who keeps to it can well afford to dispense with argument as palpably superfluous, and with evidence as obviously impertinent. Should he so far forget that great principle of precaution as to diverge from it into the modest and simple course of investigation and comparison of theory with fact and probability with proof, his task may be somewhat harder, and its result somewhat less than satisfactory. I would not advise any but an honest and candid believer in the theory which identifies genius with idiocy—which at

all events would practically define one special form of genius as a note of general idiocy—to study the speeches (they are nine in number, including two brief and final replies to the personal attacks of one Montalembert, whose name used to be rather popular among a certain class of English journalists as that of a practical worshipper of their great god Compromise, and a professional enemy of all tyranny or villainy that was not serviceable and obsequious to his Church)—to study, I say, the speeches delivered by Victor Hugo in the Legislative Assembly during a space of exactly two years and eight days. The first of these speeches dealt with the question of what in England we call pauperism—with the possibility, the necessity, and the duty of its immediate relief and its ultimate removal: the second, with the infamous and inexpiable crime which diverted against the Roman republic an expedition sent out under the plea of protecting Rome against the atrocities of Austrian triumph. A double-faced and double-dealing law, which under the name or the mask of free education aimed at securing for clerical instruction a monopoly of public support and national encouragement, was exposed and denounced by Hugo in a speech which insisted no less earnestly and eloquently on the spiritual duty and the spiritual necessity of faith and hope than on the practical necessity and duty of vigilant resistance to priestly pretention, and vigilant exposure of ecclesiastical hypocrisy and reactionary intrigue. Against 'the dry guillotine' of imprisonment in a tropical climate added to transportation for political offences, the whole eloquence of a heart as great as his genius was poured forth in fervour of indignation and pity, of passion and reason combined. The next trick of the infamous game played by the conspirators against the

commonwealth, who were now beginning to show their hand, was the mutilation of the suffrage. To this again Victor Hugo opposed the same steadfast front of earnest and rational resistance; and yet again to the sidelong attack of the same political gang on the existing freedom of the press. A year and eight days elapsed before the delivery of his next and last great speech in the Assembly which he would fain have saved from the shame and ruin then hard at hand—the harvest of its own unprincipled infatuation. The fruit of conspiracy, long manured with fraud and falsehood and all the furtive impurities of intrigue, was now ripe even to rottenness, and ready to fall into the hands already stretched towards it-into the lips yet open to protest that no one-the accuser himself must know it-that no one was dreaming of a second French empire. All that reason and indignation, eloquence and argument, loyalty and sincerity could do to save the commonwealth from destruction and the country from disgrace, was done: how utterly in vain is matter of history-of one among the darkest pages in the roll of its criminal records. The voice of truth and honour was roared and hooted down by the faction whose tactics would have discredited a den of less dishonest and more barefaced thieves; the stroke of state was ready for striking; and the orator's next address was the utterance of an exile.

There are not, even in the whole work of Victor Hugo, many pages of deeper and more pathetic interest than those which explain to us 'what exile is.' Each of the three prefaces to the three volumes of his *Actes et Paroles* is rich in living eloquence, in splendid epigram and description, narrative and satire and study of men and things: but the second, it seems to me, would still be first in attraction, if it had no

other claim than this, that it contains the record of the death of Captain Harvey. No reverence for innocent and heroic suffering, no abhorrence of triumphant and execrable crime, can impede or interfere with our sense of the incalculable profit, the measureless addition to his glory and our gain, resulting from Victor Hugo's exile of nineteen years and nine months. Greater already than all other poets of his time together, these years were to make him greater than any but the very greatest of all time. His first task was of course the discharge of a direct and practical duty; the record or registration of the events he had just witnessed, the infliction on the principal agent in them of the simple and immediate chastisement consisting in the delineation of his character and the recapitulation of his work. There would seem to be among modern Englishmen an impression—somewhat singular, it appears to me, in a race which professes to hold in special reverence a book so dependent for its arguments and its effects on a continuous appeal to conscience and emotion as the Bible—that the presence of passion, be it never so righteous, so rational, so inevitable by any one not ignoble or insane, implies the absence of reason; that such indignation as inflamed the lips of Elijah with prophecy, and armed the hand of Jesus with a scourge, is a signexcept of course in Palestine of old—that the person affected by this kind of moral excitement must needs be a lunatic of the sentimental if not rather of the criminal type. The main facts recorded in the pages of Napoléon le Petit and L'Histoire d'un Crime are simple, flagrant, palpable, indisputable. The man who takes any other view of them than is expressed in these two books must be prepared to impugn and to confute the principle that perjury, robbery, and murder are crimes. But, we are told, the perpetual vehemence of incessant imprecation, the stormy insistence of unremitting obloquy, which accompanies every chapter, illuminates every page, underlines every sentence of the narrative, must needs impair the confidence of an impartial reader in the trustworthiness of a chronicle and a commentary written throughout as in characters of flaming fire. Englishmen are proud to prefer a more temperate, a more practical, a more sedate form of political or controversial eloquence. When I remember and consider certain examples of popular oratory and controversy now flagrant and flourishing among us, I am tempted to doubt the exact accuracy of this undoubtedly plausible proposition: but, be that as it may, I must take leave to doubt yet more emphatically the implied conclusion that the best or the only good witness procurable on a question of right and wrong is one too impartial to feel enthusiasm or indignation; that indifference alike to good and evil is the sign of perfect equity and trustworthiness in a judge of moral or political questions; that a man who has witnessed a deliberate massacre of unarmed men, women, and children, if he be indiscreet enough to describe his experience in any tone but that of a scientific or æsthetic serenity, forfeits the inherent right of a reasonable and an honourable man to command a respectful and attentive hearing from all honourable and reasonable men.

But, valuable and precious as all such readers will always hold these two books of immediate and implacable history, they will not, I presume, be rated among the more important labours of their author's literary life. No one who would know fully or would estimate aright the greatest genius born into the world in our nineteenth century can afford to pass

them by with less than careful and sympathetic study: for without moral sympathy no care will enable a student to form any but a trivial and a frivolous judgment on writings which make their primary appeal to the conscience—to the moral instinct and the moral intelligence of the reader. They may perhaps not improperly be classed, for historic or biographic interest, with the Littérature et Philosophie mêlées which had been given to the world in 1834. From the crudest impressions of the boy to the ripest convictions of the man, one common quality informs and harmonizes every stage of thought, every phase of feeling, every change of spiritual outlook, which has left its mark on the writings of which that collection is composed; the quality of a pure, a perfect, an intense and burning sincerity. Apart from this personal interest which informs them all, two at least are indispensable to any serious and thorough study of Hugo's work: the fervent and reiterated intercession on behalf of the worse than neglected treasures of mediæval architecture then delivered over for a prey to the claws of the destroyer and the paws of the restorer; the superb essay on Mirabeau, which remains as a landmark or a tidemark in the history of his opinions and the development of his powers. But the highest expression of these was not to be given in prose-not even in the prose of Victor Hugo.

There is not, it seems to me, in all this marvellous life, to which wellnigh every year brought its additional aureole of glory, a point more important, a date more memorable, than the publication of the *Châtiments*. Between the prologue *Night* and the epilogue *Light* the ninety-eight poems that roll and break and lighten and thunder like waves of a visible sea fulfil the choir of their crescent and refluent

harmonies with hardly less depth and change and strength of music, with no less living force and with no less passionate unity, than the waters on whose shores they were written. Two poems, the third and the sixth, in the first of the seven books into which the collection is divided, may be taken as immediate and sufficient instances of the two different keys in which the entire book is written; of the two styles, one bitterly and keenly realistic, keeping scornfully close to shameful fact—one higher in flight and wider in range of outlook, soaring strongly to the very summits of lyric passion—which alternate in terrible and sublime antiphony throughout the living pages of this imperishable record. second Juvenal might have drawn for us with not less of angry fidelity and superb disgust the ludicrous and loathsome inmates of the den infested by holy hirelings of the clerical press: no Roman satirist could have sung, no Roman lyrist could have thundered, such a poem as that which has blasted for ever the name and the memory of the prostitute archbishop Sibour. The poniard of the priest who struck him dead at the altar he had desecrated struck a blow less deep and deadly than had been dealt already on the renegade pander of a far more infamous assassin. The next poem is a notable and remarkable example of the fusion sometimes accomplished-or, if this be thought a phrase too strong for accuracy, of the middle note sometimes touched, of the middle way sometimes taken-between the purely lyric and the purely satiric style or method. But it would be necessary to dwell on every poem, to pause at every page, if adequate justice were to be done to this or indeed to any of the volumes of verse published from this time forth by Victor Hugo. I will therefore, not without

serious diffidence, venture once more to indicate by selection such poems as seem to me most especially notable among the greatest even of these. In the first book, besides the three already mentioned, I take for examples the solemn utterance of indignant mourning addressed to the murdered dead of the fourth of December; the ringing song in praise of art which ends in a note of noble menace; the scornful song that follows it, with a burden so majestic in its variations; the fearful and faithful 'map of Europe' in 1852, with its closing word of witness for prophetic hope and faith; and the simple perfection of pathos in the song of the little forsaken birds and lambs and children. In the second book. the appeal 'To the People,' with a threefold cry for burden, calling on the buried Lazarus to rise again in words that seem to reverberate from stanza to stanza like peal upon peal of living thunder, prolonged in steadfast cadence from height to height across the hollows of a range of mountains, is one of the most wonderful symphonies of tragic and triumphant verse that ever shook the hearts of its hearers with rapture of rage and pity. The first and the two last stanzas seem to me absolutely unsurpassed and unsurpassable for pathetic majesty of music.

Partout pleurs, sanglots, cris funèbres.
Pourquoi dors-tu dans les ténèbres?
Je ne veux pas que tu sois mort.
Pourquoi dors-tu dans les ténèbres?
Ce n'est pas l'instant où l'on dort.
La pâle Liberté gît sanglante à ta porte.
Tu le sais, toi mort, elle est morte.
Voici le chacal sur ton seuil,
Voici les rats et les belettes,
Pourquoi t'es-tu laissé lier de bandelettes?

Ils te mordent dans ton cerceuil!

De tous les peuples on prépare

Le convoi . . . —

Lazare! Lazare! Lazare! Lève-toi!

Ils bâtissent des prisons neuves;
O dormeur sombre, entends les fleuves
Murmurer, teints de sang vermeil;
Entends pleurer les pauvres veuves,
O noir dormeur au dur sommeil!
Martyrs, adieu! le vent souffle, les pontons flottent,
Les mères au front gris sanglotent;
Leurs fils sont en proie aux vainqueurs;

Elles gémissent sur la route;
Les pleurs qui de leurs yeux s'échappent goutte à goutte
Filtrent en haine dans nos cœurs.
Les juifs triomphent, groupe avare

Et sans foi . . .—

Lazare! Lazare! Lazare! Lève-toi!

Mais, il semble qu'on se réveille!
Est-ce toi que j'ai dans l'oreille,
Bourdonnement du sombre essaim?
Dans la ruche frémit l'abeille;
J'entends sourdre un vague tocsin.
Les césars, oubliant qu'il est des gémonies,

S'endorment dans les symphonies,
Du lac Baltique au mont Etna;
Les peuples sont dans la nuit noire;
Dormez, rois; le clairon dit aux tyrans; victoire!

Et l'orgue leur chante : hosanna!

Qui répond à cette fanfare?

Le beffroi . . . -

Lazare! Lazare! Lazare!

If ever a more superb structure of lyric verse was devised by the brain of man, it must have been, I am very certain, in a language utterly unknown to me. Every line, every pause, every note of it should be studied and restudied by those who would thoroughly understand the lyrical capacity of Hugo's at its very highest point of power, in the fullest sweetness of its strength.

About the next poem—'Souvenir de la nuit du 4'—others may try, if they please, to write, if they can; I can only confess that I cannot. Nothing so intolerable in its pathos, I should think, was ever written.

The stately melody of the stanzas in which the exile salutes in a tone of severe content the sorrows that environ and the comforts that sustain him, the island of his refuge, the sea-birds and the sea-rocks and the sea, closes aptly with yet another thought of the mothers weeping for their children.

Puisque le juste est dans l'abîme, Puisqu'on donne le sceptre au crime, Puisque tous les droits sont trahis, Puisque les plus fiers restent mornes, Puisqu'on affiche au coin des bornes Le déshonneur de mon pays;

O République de nos pères, Grand Panthéon plein de lumières, Dôme d'or dans le libre azur, Temple des ombres immortelles, Puisqu'on vient avec des échelles Coller l'empire sur ton mur;

Puisque toute âme est affaiblie; Puisqu'on rampe; puisqu'on oublie Le vrai, le pur, le grand, le beau, Les yeux indignés de l'histoire, L'honneur, la loi, le droit, la gloire, Et ceux qui sont dans le tombeau;

Je t'aime, exil! douleur, je t'aime! Tristesse, sois mon diadème. Je t'aime, altière pauvreté! J'aime ma porte aux vents battue. J'aime le deuil, grave statue Qui vient s'asseoir à mon côté.

J'aime le malheur qui m'éprouve, Et cette ombre où je vous retrouve, O vous à qui mon cœur sourit, Dignité, foi, vertu voilée, Toi, liberté, fière exilée, Et toi, dévoûment, grand proscrit!

J'aime cette île solitaire,
Jersey, que la libre Angleterre
Couvre de son vieux pavillon,
L'eau noire, par moments accrue,
Le navire, errante charrue,
Le flot, mystérieux sillon.

J'aime ta mouette, ô mer profonde, Qui secoue en perles ton onde Sur son aile aux fauves couleurs, Plonge dans les lames géantes, Et sort de ces gueules béantes Comme l'âme sort des douleurs.

J'aime la roche solennelle D'où j'entends la plainte éternelle, Sans trêve comme le remords, Toujours renaissant dans les ombres, Des vagues sur les écueils sombres, Des mères sur leurs enfants morts.

The close of the fourth poem in the third book is a

nobler protest than ever has been uttered or ever can be uttered in prose against the servile sophism of a false democracy which affirms or allows that a people has the divine right of voting itself into bondage. There is nothing grander in Juvenal, and nothing more true.

Ce droit, sachez-le bien, chiens du berger Maupas, Et la France et le peuple eux-mêmes ne l'ont pas. L'altière Vérité jamais ne tombe en cendre. La Liberté n'est pas une guenille à vendre, Jetée au tas, pendue au clou chez un fripier. Quand un peuple se laisse au piége estropier, Le droit sacré, toujours à soi-même fidèle, Dans chaque citoven trouve une citadelle; On s'illustre en bravant un lâche conquérant, Et le moindre du peuple en devient le plus grand. Donc, trouvez du bonheur, ô plates créatures, A vivre dans la fange et dans les pourritures, Adorez ce fumier sous ce dais de brocart, L'honnête homme recule et s'accoude à l'écart. Dans la chute d'autrui je ne veux pas descendre. L'honneur n'abdique point. Nul n'a droit de me prendre Ma liberté, mon bien, mon ciel bleu, mon amour. Tout l'univers aveugle est sans droit sur le jour. Fût-on cent millions d'esclaves, je suis libre. Ainsi parle Caton. Sur la Seine ou le Tibre, Personne n'est tombé tant qu'un seul est debout. Le vieux sang des aïeux qui s'indigne et qui bout, La vertu, la fierté, la justice, l'histoire, Toute une nation avec toute sa gloire Vit dans le dernier front qui ne veut pas plier. Pour soutenir le temple il suffit d'un pilier ; Un Français, c'est la France; un Romain contient Rome, Et ce qui brise un peuple avorte aux pieds d'un homme.

The sixth and seventh poems in this book are each a superb example of its kind; the verses on an interview

between Abd-el-Kader and Bonaparte are worthy of a place among the earlier Orientales for simplicity and fullness of effect in lyric tone and colour; and satire could hardly give a finer and completer little study than that of the worthy tradesman who for love of his own strong-box would give his vote for a very Phalaris to reign over him, and put up with the brazen bull for love of the golden calf: an epigram which sums up an epoch. The indignant poem of Joyeuse Vie, with its terrible photographs of subterranean toil and want, is answered by the not less terrible though ringing and radiant song of L'empereur s'amuse; and this again by the four solemn stanzas in which a whole world of desolate suffering is condensed and realized. The verses of good counsel in which the imperial Macaire is admonished not to take himself too seriously, or trust in the duration of his fair and foul good fortune, are unsurpassed for concentration of contempt. The dialogue of the tyrannicide by the starlit sea with all visible and invisible things that impel or implore him to do justice is so splendid and thrilling in its keen and ardent brevity that we can hardly feel as though a sufficient answer were given to the instinctive reasoning which finds inarticulate utterance in the cry of the human conscience for retribution by a human hand, even when we read the two poems, at once composed and passionate in their austerity. which bid men leave God to deal with the supreme criminal of humanity. A Night's Lodging, the last poem of the fourth book, is perhaps the very finest and most perfect example of imaginative and tragic satire that exists: if this rank be due to a poem at once the most vivid in presentation, the most sublime in scorn, the most intense and absolute in condensed expression of abhorrence and in assured expression of belief.

But in the fifth of these seven caskets of chiselled gold and tempered steel there is a pearl of greater price than in any of the four yet opened. The song dated from sea, which takes farewell of all good things and all gladness left behind-of house and home, of the flowers and the sky, of the betrothed bride with her maiden brow—the song which has in its burden the heavy plashing sound of the wave following on the wave that swells and breaks against the bulwarks-the song of darkening waters and darkened lives has in it a magic, for my own ear at least, incomparable in the whole wide world of human song. Even to the greatest poets of all time such a godsend as this-such a breath of instant inspiration—can come but rarely and seem given as by miracle. 'There is sorrow on the sea,' as the prophet said of old; but when was there sorrow on sea or land which found such piercing and such perfect utterance as this?

> Adieu, patrie! L'onde est en furie. Adieu, patrie, Azur!

Adieu, maison, treille au fruit mûr, Adieu, les fleurs d'or du vieux mur!

Adieu, patrie!
Ciel, forêt, prairie!
Adieu, patrie,
Azur!

Adieu, patrie! L'onde est en furie. Adieu, patrie, Azur! Adieu, fiancée au front pur, Le ciel est noir, le vent est dur.

> Adieu, patrie! Lise, Anna, Marie! Adieu, patrie, Azur!

> Adieu, patrie!
> L'onde est en furie.
> Adieu, patrie,
> Azur!

Notre œil, que voile un deuil futur, Va du flot sombre au sort obscur.

Adieu, patrie!
Pour toi mon cœur prie.
Adieu, patrie,
Azur!

The next poem is addressed to a disappointed accomplice of the crime still triumphant and imperial in the eyes of his fellow-scoundrels, who seems to have shown signs of a desire to break away from them and a suspicion that even then the ship of empire was beginning to leak—though in fact it had still seventeen years of more or less radiant rascality to float through before it foundered in the ineffable ignominy of Sedan. Full of ringing and stinging eloquence, of keen and sonorous lines or lashes of accumulating scorn, this poem is especially noteworthy for its tribute to the murdered republic of Rome. Certain passages in certain earlier works of Hugo, in *Cromwell* for instance and in *Marie Tudor*, had given rise to a natural and indeed inevitable suspicion of some prejudice or even antipathy on the writer's part which had not less unavoidably aroused a feeling among

Italians that his disposition or tone of mind was anything but cordial or indeed amicable towards their country: a suspicion probably heightened, and a feeling probably sharpened, by his choice of such dramatic subjects from Italian history or tradition as the domestic eccentricities of the exceptional family of Borgia, and the inquisitorial misdirection of the degenerate commonwealth of Venice. To the sense that Hugo was hardly less than an enemy and that Byron had been something more than a well-wisher to Italy I have always attributed the unquestionable and otherwise inexplicable fact that Mazzini should have preferred the pinchbeck and tinsel of Byron to the gold and ivory of Hugo. But it was impossible that the master poet of the world should not live to make amends, if indeed amends were needed, to the country of Mazzini and of Dante.

If I have hardly time to mention the simple and vivid narrative of the martyrdom of Pauline Roland, I must pause at least to dwell for a moment on so famous and so great a poem as L'Expiation; but not to pronounce, or presume to endeavour to decide, which of its several pictures is the most powerful, which of its epic or lyric variations the most impressive and triumphant in effect. The huge historic pageant of ruin, from Moscow to Waterloo, from Waterloo to St. Helena, with the posthumous interlude of apotheosis which the poet had loudly and proudly celebrated just twelve years earlier in an ode, turned suddenly into the peepshow of a murderous mountebank, the tawdry triumph of buffoons besmeared with innocent blood, is so tremendous in its anticlimax that not the sublimest and most miraculous climax imaginable could make so tragic and sublime an impression so indelible from the mind. The slow agony of the

great army under the snow; its rout and dissolution in the supreme hour of panic; the slower agony, the more gradual dissolution, of the prisoner with a gaoler's eye intent on him to the last; who can say which of these three is done into verse with most faultless and sovereign power of hand, most pathetic or terrific force and skill? And the hideous judicial dishonour of the crowning retribution after death, the parody of his empire and the prostitution of his name, is so much more than tragic by reason of the very farce in it that out of ignominy itself and uttermost degradation the poet has made something more august in moral impression than all pageants of battle or of death.

In the sixth book I can but rapidly remark the peculiar beauty and greatness of the lyric lines in which the sound of steady seas regularly breaking on the rocks at Rozel Tower is rendered with so solemn and severe an echo of majestic strength in sadness; the verses addressed to the people on its likeness and unlikeness to the sea; the scornful and fiery appeal to the spirit of Juvenal; the perfect idyllic picture of spring, with all the fruitless exultation of its blossoms and its birds, made suddenly dark and dissonant by recollection of human crime and shame; the heavenly hopefulness of comfort in the message of the morning star, conveyed into colours of speech and translated into cadences of sound which no painter or musician could achieve.

Je m'étais endormi la nuit près de la grève. Un vent frais m'éveilla, je sortis de mon rêve, J'ouvris les yeux, je vis l'étoile du matin. Elle resplendissait au fond du ciel lointain Dans une blancheur molle, infinie et charmante. Aquilon s'enfuyait emportant la tourmente. L'astre éclatant changeait la nuée en duvet. C'était une clarté qui pensait, qui vivait ; Elle apaisait l'écueil où la vague déferle; On crovait voir une âme à travers une perle. Il faisait nuit encor, l'ombre régnait en vain, Le ciel s'illuminait d'un sourire divin. La lueur argentait le haut du mât qui penche; Le navire était noir, mais la voile était blanche; Des goëlands debout sur un escarpement, Attentifs, contemplaient l'étoile gravement Comme un oiseau céleste et fait d'une étincelle ; L'océan, qui ressemble au peuple, allait vers elle, Et, rugissant tout bas, la regardait briller, Et semblait avoir peur de la faire envoler. Un ineffable amour emplissait l'étendue. L'herbe verte à mes pieds frissonnait éperdue, Les oiseaux se parlaient dans les nids; une fleur Oui s'éveillait me dit : c'est l'étoile ma sœur. Et pendant qu'à longs plis l'ombre levait son voile, l'entendis une voix qui venait de l'étoile Et qui disait:—Te suis l'astre qui vient d'abord. Ie suis celle qu'on croit dans la tombe et qui sort. J'ai lui sur le Sina, j'ai lui sur le Taygète; Je suis le caillou d'or et de feu que Dieu jette. Comme avec une fronde, au front noir de la nuit. Je suis ce qui renaît quand un monde est détruit. O nations! je suis la Poésie ardente. J'ai brillé sur Moïse et j'ai brillé sur Dante. Le lion océan est amoureux de moi. l'arrive. Levez-vous, vertu, courage, foi! Penseurs, esprits! montez sur la tour, sentinelles! Paupières, ouvrez-vous; allumez-vous, prunelles; Terre, émeus le sillon ; vie, éveille le bruit ; Debout, vous qui dormez; car celui qui me suit, Car celui qui m'envoie en avant la première. C'est l'ange Liberté, c'est le géant Lumière!

The first poem of the seventh book, on the falling of the walls of Jericho before the seventh trumpet-blast, is equally great in description and in application; the third is one of the great lyric masterpieces of all time, the triumphant ballad of the Black Huntsman, unsurpassed in the world for ardour of music and fitful change of note from mystery and terror to rage and tempest and supreme serenity of exultation—'wind and storm fulfilling his word,' we may literally say of this omnipotent sovereign of song.

The sewer of Rome, a final receptacle for dead dogs and rotting Cæsars, is painted line by line and detail by detail in verse which touches with almost frightful skill the very limit of the possible or permissible to poetry in the way of realistic loathsomeness or photographic horror; relieved here and there by a rare and exquisite image, a fresh breath or tender touch of loveliness from the open air of the daylight world above. The song on the two Napoleons is a masterpiece of skilful simplicity in contrast of tones and colours. But the song which follows, written to a tune of Beethoven's, has in it something more than the whole soul of music, the whole passion of self-devoted hope and self-transfiguring faith; it gives the final word of union between sound and spirit, the mutual coronation and consummation of them both.

PATRIA.

Là-haut qui sourit?
Est-ce un esprit?
Est-ce une femme?
Quel front sombre et doux!
Peuple, à genoux!
Est-ce notre âme
Qui vient à nous?

Cette figure en deuil
Paraît sur notre seuil,
Et notre antique orgueil
Sort du cercueil.
Ses fiers regards vainqueurs
Réveillent tous les cœurs,
Les nids dans les buissons,
Et les chansons.

C'est l'ange du jour ;
L'espoir, l'amour
Du cœur qui pense ;
Du monde enchanté
C'est la clarté.
Son nom est France
Ou Vérité.

Bel ange, à ton miroir Quand s'offre un vil pouvoir, Tu viens, terrible à voir, Sous le ciel noir. Tu dis au monde : Allons! Formez vos bataillons! Et le monde ébloui Te répond: Oui.

C'est l'ange de nuit.
Rois, il vous suit,
Marquant d'avance
Le fatal moment
Au firmament.
Son nom est France
Ou Châtiment.

Ainsi que nous voyons En mai les alcyons, Voguez, ô nations, Dans ses rayons! Son bras aux cieux dressé Ferme le noir passé Et les portes de fer Du sombre enfer.

C'est l'ange de Dieu.
Dans le ciel bleu
Son aile immense
Couvre avec fierté
L'humanité.
Son nom est France
Ou Liberté!

The Caravan, a magnificent picture, is also a magnificent allegory and a magnificent hymn. The poem following sums up in twenty-six lines a whole world of terror and of tempest hurtling and wailing round the wreck of a boat by night. It is followed by a superb appeal against the infliction of death on rascals whose reptile blood would dishonour and defile the scaffold: and this again by an admonition to their chief not to put his trust in the chance of a high place of infamy among the more genuinely imperial hellhounds of historic record. The next poem gives us in perfect and exquisite summary the opinions of a contemporary conservative on a dangerous anarchist of extravagant opinions and disreputable character, whom for example's sake it was at length found necessary to crucify. There is no song more simply and nobly pitiful than that which tells us in its burden how a man may die for lack of his native country as naturally and inevitably as for lack of his daily bread. I cite only the last three stanzas by way of sample.

> Les exilés s'en vont pensifs. Leur âme, hélas! n'est plus entière. Ils regardent l'ombre des ifs

Sur les fosses du cimetière;
L'un songe à l'Allemagne altière,
L'autre au beau pays transalpin,
L'autre à sa Pologne chérie.
—On ne peut pas vivre sans pain;
On ne peut pas non plus vivre sans la patrie.—

Un proscrit, lassé de souffrir,
Mourait; calme, il fermait son livre;
Et je lui dis: 'Pourquoi mourir?'
Il me répondit: 'Pourquoi vivre?'
Puis il reprit: 'Je me délivre.
Adieu! je meurs. Néron Scapin
Met aux fers la France flétrie. . . .'
—On ne peut pas vivre sans pain;
On ne peut pas non plus vivre sans la patrie.—

'... Je meurs de ne plus voir les champs
Où je regardais l'aube naître,
De ne plus entendre les chants
Que j'entendais de ma fenêtre.
Mon âme est où je ne puis être.
Sous quatre planches de sapin
Enterrez-moi dans la prairie.'
—On ne peut pas vivre sans pain;
On ne peut pas non plus vivre sans la patrie.

Then, in the later editions of the book, came the great and terrible poem on the life and death of the miscreant marshal who gave the watchword of massacre in the streets of Paris, and died by the visitation of disease before the walls of Sebastopol. There is hardly a more splendid passage of its kind in all the Légende des Siècles than the description of the departure of the fleet in order of battle from Constantinople for the Crimea; nor a loftier passage of more pathetic austerity in all this book of Châtiments

than the final address of the poet to the miserable soul, disembodied at length after long and loathsome suffering, of the murderer and traitor who had earned no soldier's death.¹

And then come those majestic 'last words' which will ring for ever in the ears of men till manhood as well as poetry has ceased to have honour among mankind. And then comes a poem so great that I hardly dare venture to attempt a word in its praise. We cannot choose but think, as we read or repeat it, that 'such music was never made' since the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. This epilogue of a book so bitterly and inflexibly tragic begins as with a peal of golden bells, or an outbreak of all April in one choir of sunbright song; proceeds in a graver note of deep and trustful exultation and yearning towards the future; subsides again into something of a more subdued key, while the poet pleads for his faith in a God of righteousness with the righteous who are ready to despair; and rises from that tone of awe-stricken and earnest pleading to such a height and rapture of inspiration as no Hebrew psalmist or prophet ever soared beyond in his divinest passion of aspiring trust and worship. It is simply impossible that a human tongue should utter, a human hand should write, anything of more supreme and transcendent beauty than the last ten stanzas of the fourth division of this poem. The passionate and fervent accumu-

¹ This poem on Saint-Arnaud is dated from Jersey, and must therefore have been written before the second of November 1855—a date of disgrace for Jersey, if not indeed for England. It appears in the various later editions of the *Châtiments*, but has disappeared from the so-called 'édition définitive.' All readers have a right to ask why—and a right to be answered when they ask.

lation of sublimities, of marvellous images and of infinite appeal, leaves the sense too dazzled, the soul too entranced and exalted, to appreciate at first or in full the miraculous beauty of the language, the superhuman sweetness of the song. The reader impervious to such impressions may rest assured that what he admires in the prophecies or the psalms of Isaiah or of David is not the inspiration of the text, but the warrant and sign-manual of the councils and the churches which command him to admire them on trust.

Ne possède-t-il pas toute la certitude?

Dieu ne remplit-il pas ce monde, notre étude,

Du nadir au zénith?

Notre sagesse auprès de la sienne est démence;

Et n'est-ce pas à lui que la clarté commence,

Et que l'ombre finit?

Ne voit-il pas ramper les hydres sur leurs ventres? Ne regarde-t-il pas jusqu'au fond de leurs antres Atlas et Pélion?

Ne connaît-il pas l'heure où la cigogne émigre? Sait-il pas ton entrée et ta sortie, ô tigre, Et ton antre, ô lion?

Hirondelle, réponds, aigle à l'aile sonore,
Parle, avez-vous des nids que l'Éternel ignore?

O cerf, quand l'as-tu fui?
Renard, ne vois-tu pas ses yeux dans la broussaille?
Loup, quand tu sens la nuit une herbe qui tressaille,
Ne dis-tu pas: C'est lui!

Puisqu'il sait tout cela, puisqu'il peut toute chose,
Que ses doigts font jaillir les effets de la cause
Comme un noyau d'un fruit,
Puisqu'il peut mettre un ver dans les pommes de l'arbre,
Et faire disperser les colonnes de marbre
Par le vent de la nuit :

Puisqu'il bat l'océan pareil au bœuf qui beugle, Puisqu'il est le voyant et que l'homme est l'aveugle, Puisqu'il est le milieu,

Puisque son bras nous porte, et puisqu'à son passage La comète frissonne ainsi qu'en une cage

Tremble une étoupe en feu ;

Puisque l'obscure nuit le connaît, puisque l'ombre Le voit, quand il lui plaît, sauver la nef qui sombre, Comment douterions-nous,

Nous qui, fermes et purs, fiers dans nos agonies, Sommes debout devant toutes les tyrannies, Pour lui seul, à genoux!

D'ailleurs, pensons. Nos jours sont des jours d'amertume, Mais, quand nous étendons les bras dans cette brume, Nous sentons une main :

Quand nous marchons, courbés, dans l'ombre du martyre, Nous entendons quelqu'un derrière nous nous dire : C'est ici le chemin.

O proscrits, l'avenir est aux peuples! Paix, gloire, Liberté, reviendront sur des chars de victoire Aux foudroyants essieux;

Ce crime qui triomphe est fumée et mensonge; Voilà ce que je puis affirmer, moi qui songe L'œil fixé sur les cieux!

Les césars sont plus fiers que les vagues marines,
Mais Dieu dit :—Je mettrai ma boucle en leurs narines,
Et dans leur bouche un mors,
Et je les traînerai, qu'on cède ou bien qu'on lutte,
Eux et leurs histrions et leurs joueurs de flûte,

Dieu dit; et le granit que foulait leur semelle S'écroule, et les voilà disparus pêle-mêle Dans leurs prospérités! Aquilon! aquilon! qui viens battre nos portes, Oh! dis-nous, si c'est toi, souffle, qui les emportes, Où les as-tu jetés?

Dans l'ombre où sont les morts!

Three years after the Châtiments Victor Hugo published the Contemplations; the book of which he said that if the title did not sound somewhat pretentious it might be called 'the memoirs of a soul.' No book had ever in it more infinite and exquisite variety; no concert ever diversified and united such inexhaustible melodies with such unsurpassable harmonies. The note of fatherhood was never touched more tenderly than in the opening verses of gentle counsel, whose cadence is fresher and softer than the lapse of rippling water or the sense of falling dew: the picture of the poet's two little daughters in the twilight garden might defy all painters to translate it: the spirit, force, and fun of the controversial poems, overflowing at once with good humour, with serious thought, and with kindly indignation, give life and charm to the obsolete questions of wrangling schools and pedants; and the last of them, on the divine and creative power of speech, is at once profound and sublime enough to grapple easily and thoroughly with so high and deep a subject. The songs of childish loves and boyish fancies are unequalled by any other poet's known to me for their union of purity and gentleness with a touch of dawning ardour and a hint of shy delight: Lise, La Coccinelle, Vieille chanson du jeune temps, are such sweet miracles of simple perfection as we hardly find except in the old songs of unknown great poets who died and left no name. The twenty-first poem, a lyric idyl of but sixteen lines, has something more than the highest qualities of Theocritus; in colour and in melody it does but equal the Sicilian at his best, but there are two lines at least in it beyond his reach for depth and majesty of beauty. Childhood and Unity, two poems of twelve and

ten lines respectively, are a pair of such flawless jewels as lie now in no living poet's casket. Among the twentyeight poems of the second book, if I venture to name with special regard the second and the fourth, two songs uniting the subtle tenderness of Shelley's with the frank simplicity of Shakespeare's; the large and living landscape in a letter dated from Tréport; the tenth and the thirteenth poems, two of the most perfect love-songs in the world, written (if the phrase be permissible) in a key of serene rapture; the 'morning's note,' with its vision of the sublime sweetness of life transfigured in a dream; Twilight, with its opening touches of magical and mystic beauty; above all, the mournful and tender magnificence of the closing poem, with a pathetic significance in the double date appended to the text: I am ready to confess that it is perhaps presumptuous to express a preference even for these over the others. Yet perhaps it may be permissible to select for transcription two of the sweetest and shortest among them.

> Mes vers fuiraient, doux et frêles, Vers votre jardin si beau, Si mes vers avaient des ailes, Des ailes comme l'oiseau.

Ils voleraient, étincelles, Vers votre foyer qui rit, Si mes vers avaient des ailes, Des ailes comme l'esprit.

Près de vous, purs et fidèles, Ils accourraient nuit et jour, Si mes vers avaient des ailes, Des ailes comme l'amour.

Nothing of Shelley's exceeds this for limpid perfection of

melody, renewed in the next lyric with something of a deeper and more fervent note of music.

Si vous n'avez rien à me dire, Pourquoi venir auprès de moi? Pourquoi me faire ce sourire Qui tournerait la tête au roi? Si vous n'avez rien à me dire, Pourquoi venir auprès de moi?

Si vous n'avez rien à m'apprendre, Pourquoi me pressez-vous la main? Sur le rêve angélique et tendre, Auquel vous songez en chemin, Si vous n'avez rien à m'apprendre, Pourquoi me pressez-vous la main?

Si vous voulez que je m'en aille, Pourquoi passez-vous par ici? Lorsque je vous vois, je tressaille: C'est ma joie et c'est mon souci. Si vous voulez que je m'en aille, Pourquoi passez-vous par ici?

In the third book, which brings us up to the great poet's forty-second year, the noble poem called *Melancholia* has in it a foretaste and a promise of all the passionate meditation, all the studious and indefatigable pity, all the forces of wisdom and of mercy which were to find their completer and supreme expression in *Les Misérables*. In *Saturn* we may trace the same note of earnest and thoughtful meditation on the mystery of evil, on the vision so long cherished by mankind of some purgatorial world, the shrine of expiation or the seat of retribution, which in the final volume of the *Légende des Siècles* was touched again with a yet more august effect: the poem there called *Inferi* resumes and expands

the tragic thought here first admitted into speech and first clothed round with music. The four lines written beneath a crucifix may almost be said to sum up the whole soul and spirit of Christian faith or feeling in the brief hour of its early purity, revived in every age again for some rare and beautiful natures—and for these alone.

Vous qui pleurez, venez à ce Dieu, car il pleure. Vous qui souffrez, venez à lui, car il guérit. Vous qui tremblez, venez à lui, car il sourit. Vous qui passez, venez à lui, car il demeure.

La Statue, with its grim swift glance over the worldwide rottenness of imperial Rome, finds again an echo yet fuller and more sonorous than the note which it repeats in the poem on Roman decadence which forms the eighth division of the revised and completed Légende des Siècles. The two delicately tender poems on the death of a little child are well relieved by the more terrible tenderness of the poem on a mother found dead of want among her four little children. In this and the next poem, a vivid and ghastly photograph of vicious poverty, we find again the same spirit of observant and vigilant compassion that inspires and informs the great prose epic of suffering which records the redemption of Jean Valjean: and in the next, suggested by the sight (a sorrowful sight always, except perhaps to very small children or adults yet more diminutive in mental or spiritual size) of a caged lion, we recognize the depth of noble pity which moved its author to write Le Crapaud-a poem redeemed in all rational men's eyes from the imminent imputation of repulsive realism by the profound and pathetic beauty of the closing lines - and we may recognize also the

imaginative and childlike sympathy with the traditional king of beasts which inspired him long after to write L'Épopée du Lion for the benefit of his grandchildren. Insomnie, a record of the tribute exacted by the spirit from the body, when the impulse to work and to create will not let the weary workman take his rest, but enforces him, reluctant and recalcitrant, to rise and gird up his loins for labour in the field of imaginative thought, is itself a piece of work well worth the sacrifice even of the happiness of sleep. The verses on music, suggested by the figure of a flute-playing shepherd on a bas-relief; the splendid and finished picture of spring, softened rather than shadowed by the quiet thought of death; the deep and tender fancy of the dead child's return to its mother through the gateway of a second birth; the grave sweetness and gentle fervour of the verses on the outcast and detested things of the animal and the vegetable world; and, last, the nobly thoughtful and eloquent poem on the greatness of such little things as the fire on the shepherd's hearth confronting the star at sunset, which may be compared with the Prayer for all men in the Feuilles d'Automne : these at least demand a rapid word of thankful recognition before we close the first volume of the Contemplations.

The fourth book, as most readers will probably remember, contains the poems written in memory of Victor Hugo's daughter, drowned by the accidental capsizing of a pleasure-boat, just six months and seventeen days after her marriage with the young husband who chose rather to share her death than to save himself alone. These immortal songs of mourning are almost too sacred for critical appreciation of even the most reverent and subdued order. There are numberless touches in them of such thrilling beauty, so

poignant in their simplicity and so piercing in their truth, that silence is perhaps the best or the only commentary on anything so 'rarely sweet and bitter.' One only may perhaps be cited apart from its fellows: the sublime little poem headed *Mors*.

Je vis cette faucheuse. Elle était dans son champ. Elle allait à grands pas moissonnant et fauchant, Noir squelette laissant passer le crépuscule. Dans l'ombre où l'on dirait que tout tremble et recule, L'homme suivait des yeux les lueurs de sa faulx. Et les triomphateurs sous les arcs triomphaux Tombaient : elle changeait en désert Babylone. Le trône en échafaud et l'échafaud en trône. Les roses en fumier, les enfants en oiseaux, L'or en cendre, et les veux des mères en ruisseaux. Et les femmes criaient : Rends-nous ce petit être. Pour le faire mourir, pourquoi l'avoir fait naître? Ce n'était qu'un sanglot sur terre, en haut, en bas ; Des mains aux doigts osseux sortaient des noirs grabats; Un vent froid bruïssait dans les linceuls sans nombre : Les peuples éperdus semblaient sous la faulx sombre Un troupeau frissonnant qui dans l'ombre s'enfuit : Tout était sous ses pieds deuil, épouvante et nuit. Derrière elle, le front baigné de douces flammes, Un ange souriant portait la gerbe d'âmes.

The fifth book opens most fitly with an address to the noble poet who was the comrade of the author's exile and the brother of his self-devoted son-in-law. Even Hugo never wrote anything of more stately and superb simplicity than this tribute of fatherly love and praise, so well deserved and so royally bestowed. The second poem, addressed to the son of a poet who had the honour to receive the greatest of all his kind as a passing guest in the first days of his long

exile, is as simple and noble as it is gentle and austere. The third, written in reply to the expostulations of an old friend and a distant kinsman, is that admirable vindication of a man's right to grow wiser, and of his duty to speak the truth as he comes to see it better, which must have imposed silence and impressed respect on all assailants if respect for integrity and genius were possible to the imbecile or the vile, and if silence or abstinence from insult were possible to the malignant or the fool. The epilogue, appended nine years later to this high-minded and brilliant poem, is as noble in imagination, in feeling, and in expression, as the finest page in the *Châtiments*.

ÉCRIT EN 1855.

l'ajoute un post-scriptum après neuf ans. l'écoute ; Etes-vous toujours là? Vous êtes mort sans doute, Marquis; mais d'où je suis on peut parler aux morts. Ah! votre cercueil s'ouvre :--Où donc es-tu?--Dehors. Comme vous.—Es-tu mort?—Presque. J'habite l'ombre. Je suis sur un rocher qu'environne l'eau sombre, Écueil rongé des flots, de ténèbres chargé, Où s'assied, ruisselant, le blême naufragé. -Eh bien, me dites-vous, après?-La solitude Autour de moi toujours a la même attitude : Je ne vois que l'abîme, et la mer, et les cieux, Et les nuages noirs qui vont silencieux; Mon toit, la nuit, frissonne, et l'ouragan le mêle Aux souffles effrénés de l'onde et de la grêle : Quelqu'un semble clouer un crêpe à l'horizon; L'insulte bat de loin le seuil de ma maison : Le roc croule sous moi dès que mon pied s'y pose; Le vent semble avoir peur de m'approcher, et n'ose Me dire qu'en baissant la voix et qu'à demi L'adieu mystérieux que me jette un ami.

La rumeur des vivants s'éteint diminuée.

Tout ce que j'ai rêvé s'est envolé, nuée!

Sur mes jours devenus fantômes, pâle et seul,

Je regarde tomber l'infini, ce linceul.—

Et vous dites:—Après?—Sous un mont qui surplombe

Près des flots, j'ai marqué la place de ma tombe;

Ici, le bruit du gouffre est tout ce qu'on entend;

Tout est horreur et nuit.—Après?—Je suis content.

The verses addressed to friends whose love and reverence had not forsaken the exile-to Jules Janin, to Alexandre Dumas, above all to Paul Meurice—are models of stately grace in their utterance of serene and sublime resignation, of loyal and affectionate sincerity: but those addressed to the sharers of his exile—to his wife, to his children, to their friend-have yet a deeper spiritual music in the sweet and severe perfection of their solemn cadence. I have but time to name with a word of homage in passing the famous and faultless little poem Aux Feuillantines, fragrant with the memory and musical as the laugh of childhood; the memorial verses recurring here and there, with such infinite and subtle variations on the same deep theme of mourning or of sympathy; the great brief studies of lonely landscape, imbued with such grave radiance and such noble melancholy, or kindled with the motion and quickened by the music of the sea: but two poems at all events I must select for more especial tribute of more thankful recognition: the sublime and wonderful vision of the angel who was neither life nor death, but love, more strong than either; and the all but sublimer allegory couched in verse of such majestic resonance, which shows us the star of Venus in heaven above the ruin of her island on earth. The former and shorter of these is as excellent an example as could be chosen of its author's sovereign simplicity of insight and of style.

APPARITION.

Je vis un ange blanc qui passait sur ma tête; Son vol éblouissant apaisait la tempête, Et faisait taire au loin la mer pleine de bruit. -Ou'est-ce que tu viens faire, ange, dans cette nuit? Lui dis-je. Il répondit :- Je viens prendre ton âme.-Et j'eus peur, car je vis que c'était une femme; Et je lui dis, tremblant et lui tendant les bras: -Que me restera-t-il? car tu t'envoleras.-Il ne répondit pas ; le ciel que l'ombre assiége S'éteignait. . . .-Si tu prends mon âme, m'écriai-je, Où l'emporteras-tu? montre-moi dans quel lieu. Il se taisait toujours.—O passant du ciel bleu, Es-tu la mort? lui dis-je, ou bien es-tu la vie?-Et la nuit augmentait sur mon âme ravie. Et l'ange devint noir, et dit :- Je suis l'amour. Mais son front sombre était plus charmant que le jour, Et je voyais, dans l'ombre où brillaient ses prunelles, Les astres à travers les plumes de ses ailes.

If nothing were left of Hugo but the sixth book of the Contemplations, it would yet be indisputable among those who know anything of poetry that he was among the foremost in the front rank of the greatest poets of all time. Here, did space allow, it would be necessary for criticism with any pretence to adequacy to say something of every poem in turn, to pause for observation of some beauty beyond reach of others at every successive page. In the first poem a sublime humility finds such expression as should make manifest to the dullest eye not clouded by malevolence and insolent conceit that when this greatest of modern poets asserts in his

own person the high prerogative and assumes for his own spirit the high office of humanity, to confront the darkest problem and to challenge the utmost force of intangible and invisible injustice as of visible and tangible iniquity, of all imaginable as of all actual evil, of superhuman indifference as well as of human wrongdoing, it is no merely personal claim that he puts forward no vainly egotistic arrogance that he displays; but the right of a reasonable conscience and the duty of a righteous faith, common to all men alike in whom intelligence of right and wrong, perception of duty or conception of conscience, can be said to exist at all. If there be any truth in the notion of any difference between evil and good more serious than the conventional and convenient fabrications of doctrine and assumption, then assuredly the meanest of his creatures in whom the perception of this difference was not utterly extinct would have a right to denounce an omnipotent evil-doer as justly amenable to the sentence inflicted by the thunders of his own unrighteous judgment. How profound and intense was the disbelief of Victor Hugo in the rule or in the existence of any such superhuman malefactor could not be better shown than by the almost polemical passion of his prophetic testimony to that need for faith in a central conscience and a central will on which he has insisted again and again as a crowning and indispensable requisite for moral and spiritual life. From the sublime daring, the self-confidence born of self-devotion, which finds lyrical utterance in the majestic verses headed Ibo, through the humble and haughty earnestness of remonstrance and appeal-'humble to God, haughty to man'-which pervades the next three poems, the meditative and studious imagination of the poet passes into the

fuller light and larger air of thought which imbues and informs with immortal life every line of the great religious poem called Pleurs dans la nuit. In this he touches the highest point of poetic meditation, as in the epilogue to the Châtiments, written four months earlier, he had touched the highest point of poetic rapture, possible to the most ardent of believers in his faith and the most unapproachable master of his art. Where all is so lofty in its coherence of construction, so perfect in its harmony of composition, it seems presumptuous to indicate any special miracle of inspired workmanship: yet, as Hugo in his various notes on mediæval architecture was wont to select for exceptional attention and peculiar eloquence of praise this or that part or point of some superb and harmonious building, so am I tempted to dwell for a moment on the sublime imagination, the pathetic passion, of the verses which render into music the idea of a terrene and material purgatory, with its dungeons of flint and cells of clay wherein the spirit imprisoned and imbedded may envy the life and covet the suffering of the meanest animal that toils on earth; and to set beside this wonderful passage that other which even in a poem so thoroughly imbued with hope and faith finds place and voice for expression of the old mysterious and fantastic horror of the grave, more perfect than ever any mediæval painter or sculptor could achieve.

Le soir vient; l'horizon s'emplit d'inquiétude;
L'herbe tremble et bruit comme une multitude;
Le fleuve blanc reluit;
Le paysage obscur prend les veines des marbres;
Ces hydres que, le jour, on appelle des arbres,
Se tordent dans la nuit.

Le mort est seul. Il sent la nuit qui le dévore.

Quand naît le doux matin, tout l'azur de l'aurore,

Tous ses rayons si beaux,

Tout l'amour des oiseaux et leurs chansons sans nombre,

Vont aux berceaux dorés ; et, la nuit, toute l'ombre

Aboutit aux tombeaux.

Il entend des soupirs dans les fosses voisines;
Il sent la chevelure affreuse des racines
Entrer dans son cercueil;
Il est l'être vaincu dont s'empare la chose;
Il sent un doigt obscur, sous sa paupière close,
Lui retirer son œil.

Il a froid; car le soir qui mêle à son haleine
Les ténèbres, l'horreur, le spectre et le phalène,
Glace ces durs grabats;
Le cadavre, lié de bandelettes blanches,
Grelotte, et dans sa bière entend les quatre planches
Qui lui parlent tout bas.

L'une dit :—Je fermais ton coffre-fort.—Et l'autre
Dit :—J'ai servi de porte au toit qui fut le nôtre.—
L'autre dit :—Aux beaux jours,
La table où rit l'ivresse et que le vin encombre,
C'était moi.—L'autre dit :—J'étais le chevet sombre
Du lit de tes amours.

Among all the poems which follow, some exquisite in their mystic tenderness as the elegiac stanzas on Claire and the appealing address to a friend unknown (\hat{A} celle qui est voilée), others possessed with the same faith and wrestling with the same questions as beset and sustained the writer of the poem at which we have just rapidly and reverently glanced, there are three at least which demand at any rate one passing word of homage. The solemn song of medita-

tion 'at the window by night' seems to me to render in its first six lines the aspects and sounds of sea and cloud and wind and trees and stars with an utterly incomparable magic of interpretation.

Les étoiles, points d'or, percent les branches noires ;
Le flot huileux et lourd décompose ses moires
Sur l'océan blêmi ;
Les nuages ont l'air d'oiseaux prenant la fuite ;
Par moments le vent parle, et dit des mots sans suite,
Comme un homme endormi.

No poet but one could have written the three stanzas, so full of infinite sweetness and awe, inscribed 'to the angels who see us.'

—Passant, qu'es-tu? je te connais.
Mais, étant spectre, ombre et nuage,
Tu n'as plus de sexe ni d'âge.
—Je suis ta mère, et je venais!

—Et toi dont l'aile hésite et brille, Dont l'œil est noyé de douceur, Qu'es-tu, passant?—Je suis ta sœur. —Et toi, qu'es-tu ?—Je suis ta fille.

—Et toi, qu'es-tu, passant?—Je suis Celle à qui tu disais : Je t'aime! —Et toi?—Je suis ton âme même.— Oh! cachez-moi, profondes nuits!

Nor could any other hand have achieved the pathetic perfection of the verses in which just thirty years since, twelve years to a day after the loss of his daughter, and fifteen years to a day before the return of liberty which made possible the return of Victor Hugo to France, his claims to the rest into which he now has entered, and his reasons for desiring the attainment of that rest, found utterance unexcelled for divine and deep simplicity by any utterance of man on earth.

EN FRAPPANT A UNE PORTE.

J'ai perdu mon père et ma mère, Mon premier-né, bien jeune, hélas! Et pour moi la nature entière Sonne le glas.

Je dormais entre mes deux frères; Enfants, nous étions trois oiseaux; Hélas! le sort change en deux bières Leurs deux berceaux.

Je t'ai perdue, ô fille chère, Toi qui remplis, ô mon orgueil, Tout mon destin de la lumière De ton cercueil!

J'ai su monter, j'ai su descendre.
J'ai vu l'aube et l'ombre en mes cieux.
J'ai connu la pourpre, et la cendre
Qui me va mieux.

J'ai connu les ardeurs profondes, J'ai connu les sombres amours ; J'ai vu fuir les ailes, les ondes, Les yents, les jours.

J'ai sur ma tête des orfraies ; J'ai sur tous mes travaux l'affront, Au pied la poudre, au cœur des plaies, L'épine au front. J'ai des pleurs à mon œil qui pense, Des trous à ma robe en lambeau; Je n'ai rien à la conscience; Ouvre, tombeau.

Last comes the magnificent and rapturous hymn of universal redemption from suffering as from sin, the prophetic vision of evil absorbed by good, and the very worst of spirits transfigured into the likeness of the very best, in which the daring and indomitable faith of the seer finds dauntless and supreme expression in choral harmonies of unlimited and illimitable hope. The epilogue which dedicates the book to the daughter whose grave was now forbidden ground to her father—so long wont to keep there the autumnal anniversary of his mourning—is the very crown and flower of the immortal work which it inscribes, if we may say so, rather to the presence than to the memory of the dead.

Not till the thirtieth year from the publication of these two volumes was the inexhaustible labour of the spirit which inspired them to cease for a moment—and then, among us at least, for ever. Three years afterwards appeared the first series of the Légende des Siècles, to be followed nineteen years later by the second, and by the final complementary volume six years after that: so that between the inception and the conclusion of the greatest single work accomplished in the course of our century a quarter of that century had elapsed—with stranger and more tragic evolution of events than any poet or any seer could have foretold or foreseen as possible. Three years again from this memorable date appeared the great epic and tragic poem of contemporary life and of eternal humanity which gave us all the slowly ripened fruit of the studies and emotions, the passions and

the thoughts, the aspiration and the experience, brought finally to their full and perfect end in Les Misérables. As the key-note of Notre-Dame de Paris was doom-the human doom of suffering to be nobly or ignobly endured-so the key-note of its author's next romance was redemption by acceptance of suffering and discharge of duty in absolute and entire obedience to the utmost exaction of conscience when it calls for atonement, of love when it calls for sacrifice of all that makes life more endurable than death. It is obvious that no account can here be given of a book which if it required a sentence would require a volume to express the character of its quality or the variety of its excellence—the one unique, the latter infinite as the unique and infinite spirit whose intelligence and whose goodness gave it life.

Two years after Les Misérables appeared the magnificent book of meditations on the mission of art in the world, on the duty of human thought towards humanity, inscribed by Victor Hugo with the name of William Shakespeare. To allow that it throws more light on the greatest genius of our own century than on the greatest genius of the age of Shakespeare is not to admit that it is not rich in valuable and noble contemplations or suggestions on the immediate subject of Shakespeare's work; witness the admirably thoughtful and earnest remarks on Macbeth, the admirably passionate and pathetic reflections on Lear. The splendid eloquence and the heroic enthusiasm of Victor Hugo never found more noble and sustained expression than in this volume—the spontaneous and inevitable expansion of a projected preface to his son's incomparable translation of Shakespeare. The preface actually prefixed to it is admirable for concision, for insight, and for grave historic humour. It

appeared a year after the book which (so to speak) had grown out of it; and in the same year appeared the Chansons des Rues et des Bois. The miraculous dexterity of touch, the dazzling mastery of metre, the infinite fertility in variations on the same air of frolic and thoughtful fancy, would not apparently allow the judges of the moment to perceive or to appreciate the higher and deeper qualities displayed in this volume of lyric idyls. The prologue is a superb example of the power peculiar to its author above all other poets; the power of seizing on some old symbol or image which may have been in poetic use ever since verse dawned upon the brain of man, and informing it again as with life, and transforming it anew as by fire. Among innumerable exercises and excursions of dainty but indefatigable fancy there are one or two touches of a somewhat deeper note than usual which would hardly be misplaced in the gravest and most ambitious works of imaginative genius. The twelve lines (of four syllables each) addressed A la belle impérieuse are such, for example, as none but a great poet of passion, a master of imaginative style, could by any stroke of chance or at any cost of toil have written.

> L'amour, panique De la raison, Se communique Par le frisson. Laissez-moi dire, N'accordez rien. Si je soupire,

Si je demeure, Triste, à vos pieds, Et si je pleure, C'est bien, riez.

Chantez, c'est bien.

Un homme semble Souvent trompeur. Mais si je tremble, Belle, ayez peur.

The sound of the songs of a whole woodland seems to ring like audible spring sunshine through the adorable song of love and youth rejoicing among the ruins of an abbey.

> Seuls tous deux, ravis, chantants! Comme on s'aime! Comme on cueille le printemps Que Dieu sème!

Quels rires étincelants Dans ces ombres Pleines jadis de fronts blancs. De cœurs sombres!

On est tout frais mariés. On s'envoie Les charmants cris variés De la joie.

Purs ébats mêlés au vent Qui frissonne! Gaîtés que le noir couvent Assaisonne!

On effeuille des jasmins Sur la pierre Où l'abbesse joint ses mains En prière.

Les tombeaux, de croix marqués, Font partie De ces jeux, un peu piqués Par l'ortie.

On se cherche, on se poursuit,
On sent croître
Ton aube, amour, dans la nuit
Du vieux cloître.

On s'en va se becquetant,
On s'adore,
On s'embrasse à chaque instant,
Puis encore,

Sous les piliers, les arceaux, Et les marbres. C'est l'histoire des oiseaux Dans les arbres.

The inexhaustible exuberance of fancies lavished on the study of the natural church, built by the hawthorn and the nettle in the depth of the living wood, with foliage and wind and flowers, leaves the reader not unfit for such reading actually dazzled with delight. In a far different key, the Souvenir des vieilles guerres is one of Hugo's most pathetic and characteristic studies of homely and heroic life. The dialogue which follows, between the irony of scepticism and the enthusiasm of reason, on the progressive ascension of mankind, is at once sublime and subdued in the fervent tranquillity of its final tone: and the next poem, on the so-called 'great age' and its dwarf of a Cæsar with the sun for a periwig, has in it a whole volume of history and of satire condensed into nine stanzas of four lines of five syllables apiece.

LE GRAND SIÈCLE.

Ce siècle a la forme D'un monstrueux char. Sa croissance énorme Sous un nain césar, Son air de prodige, Sa gloire qui ment, Mêlent le vertige

A l'écrasement.

Louvois pour ministre, Scarron pour griffon, C'est un chant sinistre Sur un air bouffon.

Sur sa double roue Le grand char descend; L'une est dans la boue, L'autre est dans le sang.

La mort au carrosse Attelle—où va-t-il?— Lavrillière atroce, Roquelaure vil.

Comme un geai dans l'arbre Le roi s'y tient fier; Son cœur est de marbre, Son ventre est de chair.

On a pour sa nuque Et son front vermeil Fait une perruque Avec le soleil.

Il règne et végète, Effrayant zéro Sur qui se projette L'ombre du bourreau.

Ce trône est la tombe; Et sur le pavé Quelque chose en tombe Qu'on n'a point lavé. The exquisite poem on the closure of the church already described for the winter is as radiant with humour as with tenderness: and the epilogue responds in cadences of august antiphony to the moral and imaginative passion which imbues with life and fire the magnificent music of the prologue.

In the course of the next four years Victor Hugo published the last two great works which were to be dated from the haven of his exile. It would be the very ineptitude of impertinence for any man's presumption to undertake the classification or registry of his five great romances in positive order of actual merit: but I may perhaps be permitted to say without fear of deserved rebuke that none is to me personally a treasure of greater price than Les Travailleurs de la Mer. The splendid energy of the book makes the superhuman energy of the hero seem not only possible but natural, and his triumph over all physical impossibilities not only natural but inevitable. Indeed, when glancing at the animadversions of a certain sort of critics on certain points or passages in this and in the next romance of its author, I am perpetually inclined to address them in the spirit—were it worth while to address them in any wise at all-after the fashion if not after the very phrase of Mirabeau's reply to a less impertinent objector. Victor Hugo's acquaintance with navigation or other sciences may or may not have been as imperfect as Shakespeare's acquaintance with geography and natural history; the knowledge of such a man's ignorance or inaccuracy in detail is in either case of exactly equal importance: and the importance of such knowledge is for all men of sense and candour exactly equivalent to zero.

Between the tragedy of Gilliatt and the tragedy of Gwyn-

plaine Victor Hugo published nothing but the glorious little poem on the slaughter of Mentana, called La Voix de Guernesey, and (in the same year) the eloquent and ardent effusion of splendid and pensive enthusiasm prefixed to the manual or guide-book which appeared on the occasion of the international exhibition at Paris three years before the collapse of the government which then kept out of France the Frenchmen most regardful of her honour and their own. In the year preceding that collapse he published L'Homme qui Rit; a book which those who read it aright have always ranked and will always rank among his masterpieces. A year and eight months after the fall of the putative Bonaparte he published the terrible register of L'Année Terrible. More sublime wisdom, more compassionate equity, more loyal self-devotion, never found expression in verse of more varied and impassioned and pathetic magnificence. The memorial poem in which Victor Hugo so royally repaid, with praise beyond all price couched in verse beyond all praise, the loyal and constant devotion of Théophile Gautier, bears the date of All Souls' Day in the autumn of 1872. For tenderness and nobility of mingling aspiration and recollection, recollection of combatant and triumphant youth, aspiration towards the serene and sovereign ascension out of age through death, these majestic lines are worthy not merely of eternal record, but far more than that-of a distinct and a distinguished place among the poems of Victor Hugo. They are not to be found in the édition ne varietur: which, I must needs repeat, will have to be altered or modified by more variations than one before it can be accepted as a sufficient or standard edition of the complete and final text. In witness of this I cite the closing lines of a poem now buried in 'the tomb of Théophile Gautier'— a beautiful volume which has long been out of print.

Ami, je sens du sort la sombre plénitude;
J'ai commencé la mort par de la solitude,
Je vois mon profond soir vaguement s'étoiler.
Voici l'heure où je vais, aussi moi, m'en aller.
Mon fil trop long frissonne et touche presque au glaive;
Le vent qui t'emporta doucement me soulève,
Et je vais suivre ceux qui m'aimaient, moi banni.
Leur œil fixe m'attire au fond de l'infini.
J'y cours. Ne fermez pas la porte funéraire.

Passons, car c'est la loi; nul ne peut s'y soustraire; Tout penche; et ce grand siècle avec tous ses rayons Entre en cette ombre immense où, pâles, nous fuyons. Oh! quel farouche bruit font dans le crépuscule Les chênes qu'on abat pour le bûcher d'Hercule! Les chevaux de la Mort se mettent à hennir. Et sont joyeux, car l'âge éclatant va finir ; Ce siècle altier qui sut dompter le vent contraire Expire . . . — O Gautier, toi, leur égal et leur frère, Tu pars après Dumas, Lamartine et Musset. L'onde antique est tarie où l'on rajeunissait : Comme il n'est plus de Styx il n'est plus de Jouvence. Le dur faucheur avec sa large lame avance Pensif et pas à pas vers le reste du blé; C'est mon tour ; et la nuit emplit mon œil troublé Qui, devinant, hélas, l'avenir des colombes, Pleure sur des berceaux et sourit à des tombes.

Two years after the year of terror, the poet who had made its memory immortal by his record of its changes and its chances gave to the world his heroic and epic romance of *Quatrevingt-treize*; instinct with all the passion of a deeper and wider chivalry than that of old, and touched with a more than Homeric tenderness for motherhood and childhood. This book was written in the space of five months and twenty-seven days. The next year witnessed only the collection of the second series of his Actes et Paroles (Pendant l'Exil), and the publication of two brief and memorable pamphlets: the one a simple and pathetic record of the two beloved sons taken from him in such rapid succession, the other a terse and earnest plea with the judges who had spared the life of a marshal condemned on a charge of high treason to spare likewise the life of a private soldier condemned for a transgression of military discipline. Most readers will be glad to remember that on this occasion at least the voice of the intercessor was not uplifted in vain. A year afterwards he published the third series of Actes et Paroles (Depuis l'Exil), with a prefatory essay full of noble wisdom, of pungent and ardent scorn, of thoughtful and composed enthusiasm, on the eternal contrast and the everlasting battle between the spirit of clerical Rome and the spirit of republican Paris.

'Moi qu'un petit enfant rend tout à fait stupide,' I do not purpose to undertake a review of L'Art d'être Grandpère. It must suffice here to register the fact that the most absolutely and adorably beautiful book ever written appeared a year after the volume just mentioned, and some months after the second series of the Légende des Siècles; that there is not a page in it which is not above all possible eulogy or thanksgiving; that nothing was ever conceived more perfect than such poems—to take but a small handful for samples—as Un manque, La sieste, Choses du soir, Ce que dit le public (at the Jardin des Plantes or at the Zoological Gardens; ages of public ranging from five, which is com-

paratively young, to seven, which is positively old), Chant sur le berceau, the song for a round dance of children, Le pot cassé, La mise en liberté, Jeanne endormie, the delicious Chanson de grand-père, the glorious Chanson d'ancêtre, or the third of the divine and triune poems on the sleep of a little child; that after reading these—to say nothing of the rest—it seems natural to feel as though no other poet had ever known so fully or enjoyed so wisely or spoken so sweetly and so well the most precious of truths, the loveliest of loves, the sweetest and the best of doctrines.

The first of all to see the light appeared in a magazine which has long ago collapsed under the influence of far other writers than the greatest of the century. Every word of the thirty-eight lines which compose La Sieste de Jeanne -if any speech or memory of man endure so long-will be treasured as tenderly by generations as remote from the writer's as now treasure up with thankful wonder and reverence every golden fragment and jewelled spar from the wreck of Simonides or of Sappho. It has all the subtle tenderness which invests the immortal song of Danaë; and the union of perfect grace with living passion, as it were the suffusion of human flesh and blood with heavenly breath and fire, brings back once again upon our thoughts the name which is above every name in lyric song. There is not one line which could have been written and set where it stands by the hand of any lesser than the greatest among poets. For once even the high priest and even the high priestess of baby-worship who have made their names immortal among our own by this especial and most gracious attribute -even William Blake and Christina Rossetti for once are distanced in the race of song, on their own sweet ground, across their own peculiar field of Paradise. Not even in the pastures that heard his pipe keep time to the 'Songs of Innocence,' or on the 'wet bird-haunted English lawn' set ringing as from nursery windows at summer sunrise to the faultless joyous music and pealing birdlike laughter of her divine 'Sing-Song,' has there sounded quite such a note as this from the heaven of heavens in which little babies are adored by great poets, the frailest by the most potent of divine and human kind. And above the work in this lovely line of all poets in all time but one, there sits and smiles eternally the adorable baby who helps us for ever to forget all passing perversities of Christianised socialism or bastard Cæsarism which disfigure and diminish the pure proportions and the noble charm of Aurora Leigh. Even the most memorable children born to art in Florence, begotten upon stone or canvas by Andrea del Sarto or by Luca della Robbia's very self, must yield to that one the crown of sinless empire and the palm of powerless godhead which attest the natural mystery of their omnipotence; and which haply may help to explain why no accumulated abominations of cruelty and absurdity which inlay the record of its history and incrust the fabric of its creed can utterly corrode the natal beauty or corrupt the primal charm of a faith which centres at its opening round the worship of a new-born child.

The most accurate and affectionate description that I ever saw or heard given of a baby's incomparable smile, when graciously pleased to permit with courtesy and accept with kindness the votive touch of a reverential finger on its august little cheek, was given long since in the text accompanying a rich and joyous design of childish revel by

Richard Doyle. A baby in arms is there contemplating the riotous delights of its elders, fallen indeed from the sovereign state of infancy, but not yet degenerate into the lower life of adults, with that bland and tacit air of a large-minded and godlike tolerance which the devout observer will not fail to have remarked in the aspect of babies when unvexed and unincensed by any cross accident or any human shortcoming on the part of their attendant ministers. Possibly a hand which could paint that inexpressible smile might not fail also of the ability to render in mere words some sense of the ineffable quality which rests upon every line and syllable of this most divine poem. There are lines in itbut after all this is but an indirect way of saying that it is a poem by Victor Hugo-which may be taken as tests of the uttermost beauty, the extreme perfection, the supreme capacity and charm, to which the language of men can attain. It might seem as if the Fates could not allow two men capable of such work to live together in one time of the world; and that Shelley therefore had to die in his thirtieth year as soon as Hugo had attained his twentieth.

Elle fait au milieu du jour son petit somme;
Car l'enfant a besoin du rêve plus que l'homme,
Cette terre est si laide alors qu'on vient du ciel!
L'enfant cherche à revoir Chérubin, Ariel,
Ses camarades, Puck, Titania, les fées,
Et ses mains quand il dort sont par Dieu réchauffées.
Oh! comme nous serions surpris si nous voyions,
Au fond de ce sommeil sacré, plein de rayons,
Ces paradis ouverts dans l'ombre, et ces passages
D'étoiles qui font signe aux enfants d'être sages,
Ces apparitions, ces éblouissements!
Donc, à l'heure où les feux du soleil sont calmants,

Quand toute la nature écoute et se recueille, Vers midi, quand les nids se taisent, quand la feuille La plus tremblante oublie un instant de frémir, Jeanne a cette habitude aimable de dormir; Et la mère un moment respire et se repose, Car on se lasse, même à servir une rose. Ses beaux petits pieds nus dont le pas est peu sûr Dorment; et son berceau, qu'entoure un vague azur Ainsi qu'une auréole entoure une immortelle. Semble un nuage fait avec de la dentelle; On croit, en la voyant dans ce frais berceau-là, Voir une lueur rose au fond d'un falbala: On la contemple, on rit, on sent fuir la tristesse, Et c'est un astre, avant de plus la petitesse ; L'ombre, amoureuse d'elle, a l'air de l'adorer ; Le vent retient son souffle et n'ose respirer. Soudain, dans l'humble et chaste alcôve maternelle, Versant tout le matin qu'elle a dans sa prunelle, Elle ouvre la paupière, étend un bras charmant, Agite un pied, puis l'autre, et, si divinement Que des fronts dans l'azur se penchent pour l'entendre, Elle gazouille . . .- Alors, de sa voix la plus tendre, Couvant des yeux l'enfant que Dieu fait rayonner, Cherchant le plus doux nom qu'elle puisse donner A sa joie, à son ange en fleur, à sa chimère : -Te voilà réveillée, horreur! lui dit sa mère.

If the last word on so divine a subject could ever be said, it surely might well be none other than this. But with workmen of the very highest order there is no such thing as a final touch, a point at which they like others are compelled to draw bridle, a summit on which even their genius also may abide but while a man takes breath, and halt without a hope or aspiration to pass beyond it.

Far different in the promise or the menace of its theme, the poet's next work, issued in the following year, was one in spirit with the inner spirit of this book. In sublime simplicity of conception and in sovereign accomplishment of its design, Le Pape is excelled by no poem of Hugo's or of man's. In the glory of pure pathos it is perhaps excelled, as in the divine long-suffering of all-merciful wisdom it can be but equalled, by the supreme utterance of La Pitié Suprême. In splendour of changeful music and imperial magnificence of illustration the two stand unsurpassed for ever, side by side. A third poem, attacking at once the misbelief or rather the infidelity which studies and rehearses 'the grammar of assent' to creeds and articles of religion, and the blank disbelief or denial which rejects all ideals and all ideas of spiritual life, is not so rich even in satire as in reason, so earnest even in rejection of false doctrine as in assertion of free belief. Upon this book no one can hope to write anything so nearly adequate and so thoroughly worth reading as is the tribute paid to it by Théodore de Banville -the Simonides Melicertes of France.

In the midst of our confused life, turbulent and flat, bustling and indifferent, where books and plays, dreams and poems, driven down a wind of oblivion, are like the leaves which November sweeps away, and fly past, without giving us time to tell one from another, in a vague whirl and rush, at times there appears a new book by Victor Hugo, and everything lights up, resounds, murmurs, and sings at once.

'The shining, sounding, fascinating verse, with its thousand surprises of tone, of colour, of harmony, breaks forth like a rich concert, and ever newly stirred, dazzled and astonished, as if we were hearing verses for the first time, we remain stupefied with wonder before the persistent prodigy of the great seer, the great thinker, the unheard-of artist, self-transfigured without ceasing, always new and always like himself. It would be impertinent to say of him that he makes progress; and yet I find

no other word to express the fact that every hour, every minute, he adds something new, something yet more exact and yet more caressing, to that swing of syllables, that melodious play of rhyme renascent of itself, which is the grace and the invincible power of French poetry,'—

if English ears could but learn or would but hear it; whereas usually they have never been taught even the rudiments of French prosody, and receive the most perfect cadences of the most glorious or the most exquisite French poetry as a schoolboy's who has not yet learnt scansion might receive the melodies of Catullus or of Virgil.

'Let me be forgiven a seeming blasphemy; but since the time of periphrasis is over the real truth of things must be said of them. Well, then, the great peril of poetry is the risk it runs of becoming a weariness: for it may be almost sublime and yet perfectly wearisome: but, on the contrary, with all its bewildering flight, its vast circumference, and the rage of a genius intoxicated with things immeasurable, the poetry of Victor Hugo is of itself amusing into the bargain—amusing as a fairy tale, as a many-coloured festival, as a lawless and charming comedy; for in it words play unexpected parts, take on themselves a special and intense life, put on strange or graceful faces, clash one against another either cymbals of gold or urns of crystal, exchange flashes of living light and dawn.

'And let no one suspect in my choice of an epithet any idea of diminution; a garden-box on the window-sill may be thoroughly wearisome, and an immense forest may be amusing, with its shades wherein the nightingale sings, its giant trees with the blue sky showing through them, its mossy shelters where the silver brooklet hums its tune through the moistened greenery. Ay,—this is one of its qualities,—the poetry of Hugo can be read, can be devoured as one devours a new novel, because it is varied, surprising, full of the unforeseen, clear of commonplaces, like nature itself; and of such a limpid clearness as to be within the reach of every creature who can read, even when it

soars to the highest summits of philosophy and idealism. In fact, to be obscure, confused, unintelligible, is not a rare quality nor one difficult to acquire; and the first fool you may fall in with can easily attain to it. In this magnificent poem which has just appeared—as, for that matter, in all his other poems—what Victor Hugo does is just to dispel and scatter to the winds of heaven those lessons, those fogs, those rubbish-heaps, those clouds of dark bewildered words with which the sham wise men of all ages have overlaid the plain evidence of truth.'

'The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo'; and I, who cannot pretend even to the gift of eloquence proper to the son of Maia, will not presume to add a word of less valuable homage to the choicer tribute of Banville. The three poems last mentioned were respectively published in three successive years: and in the same year with Religions et Religion Victor Hugo published a fourth volume, L'Âne, in which the questions of human learning and of human training were handled with pathetic ardour and sympathetic irony. It would be superfluous if not insolent to add that the might of hand, the magic of utterance, the sovereign charm of sound and the superb expression of sense, are equal and incomparable in all.

And next year Victor Hugo gave us Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit. In the first division, the book of satire, every page bears witness that the hand which wrote the Châtiments had neither lost its strength nor forgotten its cunning; it is full of keen sense, of wise wrath, of brilliant reason and of merciful equity. The double drama which follows is one of the deepest and sweetest and richest in various effect among the masterpieces of its author. In Margarita we breathe again the same fresh air of heroic mountain-ranges and woodlands inviolable, of winds and flowers and all fair

things and thoughts, which blows through all the brighter and more gracious interludes of the Légende des Siècles: the figures of Gallus, the libertine by philosophy, and Gunich, the philosopher of profligacy,—the former a true man and true lover at heart, the latter a cynic and a courtier to the core—are as fresh in their novelty as the figures of noble old age and noble young love are fresh in their renewal and reimpression of types familiar to all hearts since the sunrise of Hernani. The tragedy which follows this little romantic comedy is but the more penetrative and piercing in its pathos and its terror for its bitter and burning vein of realism and of humour. The lyric book is a casket of jewels rich enough to outweigh the whole wealth of many a poet. After the smiling song of old times, the stately song of to-day with its other stars and its other roses, in sight of the shadow where grows the deathless flower of death, pale and haggard, with its shadowy perfume: the song of all sweet waking dreams and visions, and sweetest among them all the vision of a tyrant loyally slain: the song on hearing a princess sing, sweeter than all singing and simple as 'the very virtue of compassion': the song of evening, and rest from trouble, and prayer in sorrow, and hope in death: the many-coloured and sounding song of seaside winter nights: the song of three nests, the reed-warbler's and the martlet's made with moss and straw, in the wall or on the water, and love's with glances and smiles, in the lover's inmost heart: the song of the watcher by twilight on the cliff, which strikes a note afterwards repeated and prolonged in the last issue of the Légende des Siècles, full of mystery and mourning and fear and faith: the brief deep note of bewildered sorrow that succeeds it: the great wild vision of death and night, cast into

words which have the very sound of wind and storm and water, the very shape and likeness of things actually touched or seen: the soft and sublime song of dawn as it rises on the thinker deep sunk in meditation on death and on life to come: the strange dialogue underground, grim and sweet, between the corpse and the rose-tree: the song of exile in May, sweet as flowers and bitter as tears: the lofty poem of suffering which rejects the old Roman refuge of stoic suicide: the light swift song of a lover's quarrel between the earth and the sun in wintertime: the unspeakably sweet song of the daisy that smiles at coming winter, the star that smiles at coming night, the soul that smiles at coming death: the most pathetic and heroic song of all, the cry of exile towards the graves of the beloved over sea, that weeps and is not weary: the simple and sublime verses on the mountain desolation to which truth and conscience were the guides: the four magnificent studies of sea and land, Promenades dans les rochers: the admirable verses on that holy mystery of terror perceptible in the most glorious works alike of nature and of poetry: all these and more are fitly wound up by the noble hymn on planting the oak of the United States of Europe in the garden of the house of exile. A few of the briefer among these may here be taken as examples of a gift not merely unequalled but unapproached by any but the greatest among poets. And first we may choose the following unsurpassable psalm of evensong.

Un hymne harmonieux sort des feuilles du tremble; Les voyageurs craintifs, qui vont la nuit ensemble, Haussent la voix dans l'ombre où l'on doit se hâter. Laissez tout ce qui tremble Chanter. Les marins fatigués sommeillent sur legouffre. La mer bleue où Vésuve épand ses flots de soufre Se tait dès qu'il s'éteint, et cesse de gémir,

Laissez tout ce qui souffre

Quand la vie est mauvaise on la rêve meilleure. Les yeux en pleurs au ciel se lèvent à toute heure ; L'espoir vers Dieu se tourne et Dieu l'entend crier. Laissez tout ce qui pleure Prier.

C'est pour renaître ailleurs qu'ici-bas on succombe.

Tout ce qui tourbillonne appartient à la tombe.

Il faut dans le grand tout tôt ou tard s'absorber.

Laissez tout ce qui tombe

Laissez tout ce qui tomb
Tomber!

Next, we may take two songs of earlier and later life, whose contrast is perfect concord.

I.

CHANSON D'AUTREFOIS.

Jamais elle ne raille, Etant un calme esprit; Mais toujours elle rit.—

Voici des brins de mousse avec des brins de paille; Fauvette des roseaux,

Fais ton nid sur les eaux.

Quand sous la clarté douce Qui sort de tes beaux yeux On passe, on est joyeux.—

Voici des brins de paille avec des brins de mousse; Martinet de l'azur,

Fais ton nid dans mon mur.

Dans l'aube avril se mire,
Et les rameaux fleuris
Sont pleins de petits cris.—
Voici de son regard, voici de son sourire;
Amour, ô doux vainqueur,
Fais ton nid dans mon cœur.

II.

CHANSON D'AUJOURD'HUI.

Je disais:—Dieu qu'aucun suppliant n'importune, Quand vous m'éprouverez dans votre volonté, Laissez mon libre choix choisir dans la fortune L'un ou l'autre côté;

Entre un riche esclavage et la pauvreté franche Laissez-moi choisir, Dieu du cèdre et du roseau; Entre l'or de la cage et le vert de la branche Faites juge l'oiseau.—

Maintenant je suis libre et la nuit me réclame; J'ai choisi l'âpre exil; j'habite un bois obscur; Mais je vois s'allumer les étoiles de l'âme Dans mon sinistre azur.

If this can be surpassed for outward and inward sweetness, the following poem may perhaps have been equalled for sensible and spiritual terror in the range of lyric song.

EN MARCHANT LA NUIT DANS UN BOIS.

I.

Il grêle, il pleut. Neige et brume ; Fondrière à chaque pas. Le torrent veut, crie, écume, Et le rocher ne veut pas. Le sabbat à notre oreille Jette ses vagues hourras. Un fagot sur une vieille Passe en agitant les bras.

Passants hideux, clartés blanches; Il semble, en ces noirs chemins, Que les hommes ont des branches, Que les arbres ont des mains.

17.

On entend passer un coche, Le lourd coche de la mort. Il vient, il roule, il approche. L'eau hurle et la bise mord.

Le dur cocher, dans la plaine Aux aspects noirs et changeants, Conduit sa voiture pleine De toute sorte de gens.

Novembre souffle, la terre Frémit, la bourrasque fond Les flèches du sagittaire Sifflent dans le ciel profond.

111

-Cocher, d'où viens-tu? dit l'arbre, -Où vas-tu? dit l'eau qui fuit. Le cocher est fait de marbre Et le coche est fait de nuit.

Il emporte beauté, gloire, Joie, amour, plaisirs bruyants; La voiture est toute noire, Les chevaux sont effrayants.

L'arbre en frissonnant s'incline. L'eau sent les joncs se dresser. Le buisson sur la colline Grimpe pour le voir passer.

IV.

Le brin d'herbe sur la roche, Le nuage dans le ciel, Regarde marcher ce coche, Et croit voir rouler Babel.

Sur sa morne silhouette, Battant de l'aile à grands cris, Volent l'orage, chouette, Et l'ombre, chauve-souris.

Vent glacé, tu nous secoues! Le char roule, et l'œil tremblant, À travers ses grandes roues, Voit un crépuscule blanc.

v.

La nuit, sinistre merveille, Répand son effroi sacré; Toute la forêt s'éveille, Comme un dormeur effaré.

Après les oiseaux, les âmes! Volez sous les cieux blafards. L'étang, miroir, rit aux femmes Qui sortent des nénuphars.

L'air sanglote, et le vent râle, Et, sous l'obscur firmament, La nuit sombre et la mort pâle Se regardent fixement.

But the twenty-fifth poem in this book of lyrics has assuredly never been excelled since first the impulse of articulate song awoke in the first recorded or unrecorded poet.

Proscrit, regarde les roses; Mai joyeux, de l'aube en pleurs Les reçoit toutes écloses; Proscrit, regarde les fleurs. —Je pense Aux roses que je semai. Le mois de mai sans la France, Ce n'est pas le mois de mai.

Proscrit, regarde les tombes ; Mai, qui rit aux cieux si beaux, Sous les baisers des colombes Fait palpiter les tombeaux,

—Je pense Aux yeux chers que je fermai. Le mois de mai sans la France, Ce n'est pas le mois de mai.

Proscrit, regarde les branches, Les branches où sont les nids; Mai les remplit d'ailes blanches Et de soupirs infinis.

—Je pense Aux nids charmants où j'aimai. Le mois de mai sans la France, Ce n'est pas le mois de mai.

Mai 1854.

In October of the same year—the second year of his long exile—a loftier note of no less heavenly melody was sounded by the lyric poet who alone of all his nation has taken his place beside Coleridge and Shelley. The word 'passant,' as addressed by the soul to the body, is perhaps the very finest expression of his fervent faith in immortality to be found in all the work of Victor Hugo.

Il est un peu tard pour faire la belle, Reine marguerite; aux champs défleuris Bientôt vont souffler le givre et la grêle. —Passant, l'hiver vient, et je lui souris. Il est un peu tard pour faire la belle, Etoile du soir; les rayons taris Sont tous retournés à l'aube éternelle. —Passant, la nuit vient, et je lui souris.

Il est un peu tard pour faire la belle, Mon âme; joyeuse en mes noirs débris, Tu m'éblouis, fière et rouvrant ton aile. —Passant, la mort vient, et je lui souris.

No date is affixed to the divine song of yearning after home and the graves which make holier for every man old enough to have been a mourner the native land which holds them. The play on sound which distinguishes the last repetition of the burden is the crowning evidence that the subtlest effect of pathos and the most austere effect of sublimity may be conveyed through a trick of language familiar in their highest and most serious moods to Æschylus and to Shakespeare.

EXIL.

Si je pouvais voir, ô patrie, Tes amandiers et tes lilas, Et fouler ton herbe fleurie, Hélas!

Si je pouvais,—mais, ô mon père, O ma mère, je ne peux pas,— Prendre pour chevet votre pierre, Hélas!

Dans le froid cercueil qui vous gêne, Si je pouvais vous parler bas, Mon frère Abel, mon frère Eugène, Hélas! Si je pouvais, ô ma colombe, Et toi, mère, qui t'envolas, M'agenouiller sur votre tombe, Hélas!

Oh! vers l'étoile solitaire, Comme je lèverais les bras! Comme je baiserais la terre, Hélas!

Loin de vous, ô morts que je pleure, Des flots noirs j'écoute le glas ; Je voudrais fuir, mais je demeure, Hélas!

Pourtant le sort, caché dans l'ombre, Se trompe si, comptant mes pas, Il croit que le vieux marcheur sombre Est las.

The epic book is the most tragic and terrible of all existing poems of its kind; if indeed we may say that it properly belongs to any kind existing before its advent. The growing horror of the gradual vision of history, from Henri the Fourth to his bloody and gloomy son, from Louis the Thirteenth to the murderer and hangman of the Palatinate and the Cévennes, from Louis the Fourteenth to the inexpressible pollution of incarnate ignominy in his grandson, seems to heave and swell as a sea towards the coming thunder which was to break above the severed head of their miserable son.

And next year came *Torquemada*: one of the greatest masterpieces of the master poet of our century. The construction of this tragedy is absolutely original and unique: free and full of change as the wildest and loosest and

roughest of dramatic structures ever flung together, and left to crumble or cohere at the pleasure of accident or of luck, by the rudest of primæval playwrights: but perfect in harmonious unity of spirit, in symmetry or symphony of part with part, as the most finished and flawless creation of Sophocles or of Phidias. Between some of the characters in this play and some of those in previous plays of Hugo's there is a certain resemblance as of kinship, but no touch or shadow of mere repetition or reproduction from types which had been used before: Ferdinand the Catholic has something in his lineaments of Louis the Just, and Gucho of L'Angely in Marion de Lorme: the marquis of Fuentel has a touch of Gunich in Les deux trouvailles de Gallus, redeemed by a better touch of human tenderness for his recovered grandson. The young lovers are two of the loveliest figures, Torquemada is one of the sublimest, in all the illimitable world of dramatic imagination. The intensity of interest, anxiety, and terror, which grows by such rapid and subtle stages of development up to the thunderstroke of royal decision at the close of the first act, is exchanged in the second for an even deeper and higher kind of emotion. The confrontation of the hermit with the inquisitor, magnificent enough already in its singleness of effect, is at once transfigured and completed by the apparition of the tremendous figure whose very name is tragedy, whose very shadow sufficed for the central and the crowning terror which darkened the stage of Lucrèce Borgia.

LE CHASSEUR.

Le hasard a pétri la cendre avec l'instant; Cet amalgame est l'homme. Or, moi-même n'étant

Comme vous que matière, ah! je serais stupide D'être hésitant et lourd quand la joie est rapide. De ne point mordre en hâte au plaisir dans la nuit, Et de ne pas goûter à tout, puisque tout fuit! Avant tout, être heureux. Je prends à mon service Ce qu'on appelle crime et ce qu'on nomme vice. L'inceste, préjugé. Le meurtre, expédient. J'honore le scrupule en le congédiant. Est-ce que vous croyez que, si ma fille est belle, Je me gênerai, moi, pour être amoureux d'elle! Ah ça, mais je serais un imbécile. Il faut Que j'existe. Allez donc demander au gerfaut. A l'aigle, à l'épervier, si cette chair qu'il broie Est permise, et s'il sait de quel nid sort sa proie, Parce que vous portez un habit noir ou blanc, Vous vous croyez forcé d'être inepte et tremblant, Et vous baissez les veux devant cette offre immense Du bonheur, que vous fait l'univers en démence. Avons donc de l'esprit. Profitons du temps. Etant le résultat de la mort, vivons bien ! La salle de bal croule et devient catacombe. L'âme du sage arrive en dansant dans la tombe. Servez-moi mon festin. S'il exige aujourd'hui Un assaisonnement de poison pour autrui, Soit. Qu'importe la mort des autres! J'ai la vie. Te suis une faim, vaste, ardente, inassouvie. Mort, je veux t'oublier; Dieu, je veux t'ignorer. Oui, le monde est pour moi le fruit à dévorer. Vivant, je suis en hâte heureux; mort, je m'échappe!

FRANÇOIS DE PAULE, à Torquemada. Qu'est-ce que ce bandit?

TORQUEMADA.

Mon père, c'est le pape.

The third act revives again the more immediate and personal interest of the drama. Terror and pity never rose

higher, never found utterance more sublime and piercing, in any work of any poet in the world, than here in the scene of the supplication of the Jews, and the ensuing scene of the triumph of Torquemada.

The Jews enter; men, women, and children all covered with ashes and clothed in rags, barefoot, with ropes round their necks, some mutilated and made infirm by torture, dragging themselves on crutches or on stumps; others, whose eyes have been put out, are led by children. And their spokesman pleads thus with the king and the queen of the kingdoms from whence they are to be driven by Christian jurisdiction.

Moïse-Ben-Habib, grand rabbin, a genoux.

Altesse de Castille, altesse d'Aragon, Roi, reine! ô notre maître, et vous, notre maîtresse, Nous, vos tremblants sujets, nous sommes en détresse, Et, pieds nus, corde au cou, nous prions Dieu d'abord, Et vous ensuite, étant dans l'ombre de la mort, Ayant plusieurs de nous qu'on va livrer aux flammes, Et tout le reste étant chassé, vieillards et femmes, Et, sous l'œil qui voit tout du fond du firmament, Rois, nous vous apportons notre gémissement. Altesses, vos décrets sur nous se précipitent, Nous pleurons, et les os de nos pères palpitent; Le sépulcre pensif tremble à cause de vous. Ayez pitié. Nos cœurs sont fidèles et doux ; Nous vivons enfermés dans nos maisons étroites, Humbles, seuls; nos lois sont très simples et très droites. Tellement qu'un enfant les mettrait en écrit. Jamais le juif ne chante et jamais il ne rit. Nous payons le tribut, n'importe quelles sommes. On nous remue à terre avec le pied; nous sommes

Comme le vêtement d'un homme assassiné. Gloire à Dieu! Mais faut-il qu' avec le nouveau-né. Avec l'enfant qu'on tette, avec l'enfant qu'on sèvre. Nu, poussant devant lui son chien, son bœuf, sa chèvre, Israël fuie et coure épars dans tous les sens! Qu'on ne soit plus un peuple et qu'on soit des passants! Rois, ne nous faites pas chasser à coups de piques. Et Dieu vous ouvrira des portes magnifiques. Avez pitié de nous. Nous sommes accablés. Nous ne verrons donc plus nos arbres et nos blés! Les mères n'auront plus de lait dans leurs mamelles! Les bêtes dans les bois sont avec leurs femelles. Les nids dorment heureux sous les branches blottis, On laisse en paix la biche allaiter ses petits, Permettez-nous de vivre aussi, nous, dans nos caves, Sous nos pauvres toits, presque au bagne et presque esclaves,

Mais auprès des cercueils de nos pères! daignez Nous souffrir sous vos pieds de nos larmes baignés! Oh! la dispersion sur les routes lointaines, Ouel deuil! Permettez-nous de boire à nos fontaines Et de vivre en nos champs, et vous prospérerez. Hélas! nous nous tordons les bras, désespérés! Épargnez-nous l'exil, ô rois, et l'agonie De la solitude âpre, éternelle, infinie! Laissez-nous la patrie et laissez-nous le ciel! Le pain sur qui l'on pleure en mangeant est du fiel. Ne sovez pas le vent si nous sommes la cendre. Voici notre rançon, hélas! daignez la prendre. O rois, protégez-nous. Voyez nos désespoirs. Sovez sur nous, mais non comme des anges noirs ; Soyez des anges bons et doux, car l'aile sombre Et l'aile blanche, ô rois, ne font pas la même ombre. Révoquez votre arrêt. Rois, nous vous supplions Par vos aïeux sacrés, grands comme les lions, Par les tombeaux des rois, par les tombeaux des reines. Profonds et pénétrés de lumières sereines.

Et nous mettons nos cœurs, ô maîtres des humains, Nos prières, nos deuils dans les petites mains De votre infante Jeanne, innocente, et pareille À la fraise des bois où se pose l'abeille. Roi, reine, ayez pitié!

After the sublime and inexpressible pathos of this appeal from age and innocence against the most execrable of all religions that ever infected earth and verified hell, it would have been impossible for any poet but one to find expression for the passion of unselfish faith in that infernal creed which should not merely horrify and disgust us. But when Hugo brings before us the figure of the grand inquisitor in contemplation of the supreme act of faith accomplished in defiance of king and queen to the greater glory of God, for the ultimate redemption of souls else condemned to everlasting torment, the rapture of the terrible redeemer, whose faith is in salvation by fire, is rendered into words of such magical and magnificent inspiration that the conscience of our fancy is wellnigh conquered and convinced and converted for the moment as we read.

TORQUEMADA.

O fête, ô gloire, ô joie
La clémence terrible et superbe flamboie!
Délivrance à jamais! Damnés, soyez absous!
Le bûcher sur la terre éteint l'enfer dessous.
Sois béni, toi par qui l'âme au bonheur remonte,
Bûcher, gloire du feu dont l'enfer est la honte,
Issue aboutissant au radieux chemin,
Porte du paradis rouverte au genre humain,
Miséricorde ardente aux caresses sans nombre,
Mystérieux rachat des esclaves de l'ombre,

Auto-da-fé! Pardon, bonté, lumière, feu,
Vie! éblouissement de la face de Dieu!
Oh! quel départ splendide et que d'âmes sauvées!
Juifs, mécréants, pécheurs, ô mes chères couvées,
Un court tourment vous paie un bonheur infini;
L'homme n'est plus maudit, l'homme n'est plus banni;
Le salut s'ouvre au fond des cieux. L'amour s'éveille,
Et voici son triomphe, et voici sa merveille!
Quelle extase! entrer droit au ciel! ne pas languir!

Cris dans le brasier.

Entendez-vous Satan hurler de les voir fuir? Que l'éternel forçat pleure en l'éternel bouge! J'ai poussé de mes poings l'énorme porte rouge. Oh! comme il a grincé lorsque je refermais Sur lui les deux battants hideux, Toujours, Jamais! Sinistre, il est resté derrière le mur sombre.

Il regarde le ciel.

Oh! j'ai pansé la plaie effrayante de l'ombre.
Le paradis souffrait; le ciel avait au flanc
Cet ulcère, l'enfer brûlant, l'enfer sanglant;
J'ai posé sur l'enfer la flamme bienfaitrice,
Et j'en vois dans l'immense azur la cicatrice.
C'était ton coup de lance au côté, Jésus-Christ!
Hosanna! la blessure éternelle guérit.
Plus d'enfer. C'est fini. Les douleurs sont taries.

Il regarde le quemadero.

Rubis de la fournaise! ô braises! pierreries!
Flambez, tisons! brûlez, charbons! feu souverain,
Pétille! luis, bûcher! prodigieux écrin
D'étincelles qui vont devenir des étoiles!
Les âmes, hors des corps comme hors de leurs voiles,
S'en vont, et le bonheur sort du bain de tourments!
Splendeur! magnificence ardente! flamboiements!
Satan, mon ennemi, qu'en dis-tu?

En extase.

Feu! lavage

De toutes les noirceurs par la flamme sauvage!

Transfiguration suprême! acte de foi!

Nous sommes deux sous l'œil de Dieu, Satan et moi.

Deux porte-fourches, lui, moi. Deux maîtres des flammes.

Lui perdant les humains, moi secourant les âmes;

Tous deux bourreaux, faisant par le même moyen

Lui l'enfer, moi le ciel, lui le mal, moi le bien;

Il est dans le cloaque et je suis dans le temple,

Et le noir tremblement de l'ombre nous contemple.

Il se retourne vers les suppliciés.

Ah! sans moi, vous étiez perdus, mes bien-aimés!
La piscine de feu vous épure enflammés.
Ah! vous me maudissez pour un instant qui passe,
Enfants! mais tout à l'heure, oui, vous me rendrez grâce
Quand vous verrez à quoi vous avez échappé;
Car, ainsi que Michel-Archange, j'ai frappé;
Car les blancs séraphins, penchés au puits de soufre,
Raillent le monstrueux avortement du gouffre;
Car votre hurlement de haine arrive au jour,
Bégaie, et, stupéfait, s'achève en chant d'amour!
Oh! comme j'ai souffert de vous voir dans les chambres
De torture, criant, pleurant, tordant vos membres,
Maniés par l'étau d'airain, par le fer chaud!
Vous voilà délivrés, partez, fuyez là-haut!
Entrez au paradis!

Il se penche et semble regarder sous terre.

Non, tu n'auras plus d'âmes!

Il se redresse.

Dieu nous donne l'appui que nous lui demandâmes, Et l'homme est hors du gouffre. Allez, allez ! A travers l'ombre ardente et les grands feux ailés, L'évanouissement de la fumée emporte Là-haut l'esprit vivant sauvé de la chair morte ! Tout le vieux crime humain de l'homme est arraché; L'un avait son erreur, l'autre avait son péché, Faute ou vice, chaque âme avait son monstre en elle Qui rongeait sa lumière et qui mordait son aile; L'ange expirait en proie au démon. Maintenant Tout brûle, et le partage auguste et rayonnant

Se fait devant Jésus dans la clarté des tombes. Dragons, tombez en cendre; envolez-vous, colombes! Vous que l'enfer tenait, liberté! liberté! Montez de l'ombre au jour. Changez d'éternité!

The last act would indeed be too cruel for endurance if it were not too beautiful for blame. But not the inquisition itself was more inevitably inexorable than is the spiritual law, the unalterable and immitigable instinct, of tragic poetry at its highest. Dante could not redeem Francesca, Shakespeare could not rescue Cordelia. To none of us, we must think, can the children of a great poet's divine imagination seem dearer or more deserving of mercy than they seemed to their creator: but when poetry demands their immolation, they must die, that they may live for ever.

Once more, but now for the last time, the world was to receive yet another gift from the living hand of the greatest man it had seen since Shakespeare. Towards the close of his eighty-second year he bestowed on us the crowning volume of his crowning work, the imperishable and inappreciable Légende des Siècles. And at the age of eighty-three years, two months, and twenty-six days, he entered into rest for ever, and into glory which can perish only with the memory of all things memorable among all races and nations of mankind.

I have spoken here—and no man can know so well or feel so deeply as myself with what imperfection of utterance and inadequacy of insight I have spoken—of Victor Hugo as the whole world knew and as all honourable or intelligent men regarded and revered him. But there are those among his friends and mine who would have a right to wonder if no word were here to be said of the unsolicited and un-

merited kindness which first vouchsafed to take notice of a crude and puerile attempt to render some tribute of thanks for the gifts of his genius just twenty-three years ago; of the kindness which was always but too ready to recognize and requite a gratitude which had no claim on him but that of a very perfect loyalty; of the kindness which many years afterwards received me as a guest under his roof with the welcome of a father to a son. Such matters, if touched on at all, unquestionably should not be dwelt on in public: but to give them no word whatever of acknowledgment at parting would show rather unthankfulness than reserve in one who was honoured so far above all possible hope or merit by the paternal goodness of Victor Hugo.

1885.

LA LÉGENDE DES SIÈCLES

1883.

'Chacun a sa manière. Quant à moi, qui parle ici, j'admire tout, comme une brute.— N'espérez donc aucune critique.—Je ne chicane point ces grands bienfaiteurs-là. Ce que vous qualifiez défaut, je le qualifie accent. Je reçois et je remercic.—Ayant eu l'honneur d'être appelé "niais" par plusieurs écrivains et critiques distingués, je cherche à justifier l'épithète.'

The greatest work of the century is now at length complete. It is upwards of twenty-four years since the first part of it was sent home to France from Guernsey. Eighteen years later we received a second instalment of the yet unexhausted treasure. And here, at the age of eighty-one, the sovereign poet of the world has placed the copingstone on the stateliest of spiritual buildings that ever in modern times has been reared for the wonder and the worship of mankind.

Those only to whom nothing seems difficult because nothing to them seems greater than themselves could find it other than an arduous undertaking to utter some word of not unworthy welcome and thanksgiving when their life is suddenly enriched and brightened by such an addition to its most precious things as the dawn of a whole new world of

song-and a world that may hold its own in heaven beside the suns created or evoked by the fiat of Shakespeare or of Dante. To review the Divine Comedy, to dispose of Hamlet in the course of a leading article, to despatch in a few sentences the question of Paradise Lost and its claim to immortality, might seem easy to judges who should feel themselves on a level with the givers of these gifts; for others it could be none the less difficult to discharge this office because the gift was but newly given. One minor phase of the difficulty which presents itself is this: the temporary judge, selfelected to pass sentence on any supreme achievement of human power, must choose on which horn of an inevitable dilemma he may prefer to run the risk of impalement. If, recognising in this new master-work an equal share of the highest qualities possible to man with that possessed and manifested by any previous writer of now unquestioned supremacy, he takes upon himself to admit, simply and honestly, that he does recognise this, and cannot choose but recognise it, he must know that his judgment will be received with no more tolerance or respect, with no less irritation and derision, than would have been, in Dante's time, the judgment of a critic who should have ventured to rank Dante above Virgil, in Shakespeare's time of a critic who should have dared to set Shakespeare beside Homer. If, on the other hand, he should abstain with all due discretion from any utterance or any intimation of a truth so ridiculous and untimely, he runs the sure and certain risk of leaving behind him a name to be ranked, by all who remember it at all, with those which no man mentions without a smile of compassion or of scorn, according to the quality of error discernible in the critic's misjudgment: innocent and incurable

as the confidence of a Johnson or a Jeffrey, venomous and malignant as the rancour of Sainte-Beuve or Gifford. Of these two dangers I choose the former; and venture to admit, in each case with equal diffidence, that I do upon the whole prefer Dante to any Cino or Cecco, Shakespeare to all the Greenes and Peeles and Lillys, Victor Hugo to all or any, of their respective times. The reader who has no tolerance for paradox or presumption has therefore fair warning to read no further.

Auguste Vacquerie, of all poets and all men living the most worthy to praise the greatest poet of his century, has put on record long ago, with all the vivid ardour of his admirable style, an experience of which I now am but too forcibly reminded. He was once invited by Victor Hugo to choose among the manuscripts of the master's unpublished work, from the drawers containing respectively some lyric or dramatic or narrative masterpiece, of which among the three kinds he would prefer to have a sample first. Unable to select, he touched a drawer at random, which contained the opening chapters of a yet unfinished story—Les Misérables. If it is no less hard to choose where to begin in a notice of the Légende des Siècles-to decide what star in all this thronged and living heaven should first attract the direction of our critical telescope—it is on the other hand no less certain that on no side can the telescope be misdirected. From the miraculous music of a legendary dawn, when the first woman felt first within her the movement of her firstborn child, to the crowning vision of ultimate justice made visible and material in the likeness of the trumpet of doom. no radiance or shadow of days or nights intervening, no change of light or cadence of music in all the tragic pageant of the centuries, finds less perfect expression and response, less absolute refraction or reflection, than all that come and go before or after it. History and legend, fact and vision, are fused and harmonised by the mastering charm of moral unity in imaginative truth. There is no more possibility of discord or default in this transcendent work of human power than in the working of those powers of nature which transcend humanity. In the first verses of the overture we hear such depth and height of music, see such breadth and splendour of beauty, that we know at once these cannot but continue to the end; and from the end, when we arrive at the goal of the last line, we look back and perceive that it has been so. Were this overture but a thought less perfect, a shade less triumphant, we might doubt if what was to follow it could be as perfect and triumphant as itself. We might begin-and indeed, as it is, there are naturally those who have begun-to debate with ourselves or to dispute with the poet as to the details of his scheme, the selection of his types, the propriety of his method, the accuracy of his title. There are those who would seem to infer from the choice of this title that the book is, in the most vulgar sense, of a purely legendary cast; who object, for example, that a record of unselfish and devoted charity shown by the poor to the poor is, happily, no 'legend.' Writers in whom such self-exposure of naked and unashamed ignorance with respect to the rudiments of language is hardly to be feared have apparently been induced or inclined to expect some elaborate and orderly review of history, some versified chronicle of celebrated events and significant epochs, such as might perhaps be of subsidiary or supplementary service in the training of candidates for a competitive examination; and

on finding something very different from this have tossed head and shrugged shoulder in somewhat mistimed impatience, as at some deception or misnomer on the great author's part which they, as men of culture and understanding, had a reasonable right to resent. The book, they affirm, is a mere agglomeration of unconnected episodes, irrelevant and incoherent, disproportionate and fortuitous, chosen at random by accident or caprice; it is not one great palace of poetry, but a series or congeries rather of magnificently accumulated fragments. It may be urged in answer to this impeachment that the unity of the book is not logical but spiritual; its diversity is not accidental or chaotic, it is the result and expression of a spontaneous and perfect harmony, as clear and as profound as that of the other greatest works achieved by man. To demonstrate this by rule and line of syllogism is no present ambition of mine. A humbler, a safer, and perhaps a more profitable task would be to attempt some flying summary, some glancing revision of the three great parts which compose this mightiest poem of our age; or rather, if this also should seem too presumptuous an aspiration, to indicate here and there the points to which memory and imagination are most fain to revert most frequently and brood upon them longest, with a deeper delight, a more rapturous reverence, than waits upon the rest. Not that I would venture to assert or to insinuate that there is in any poem of the cycle any note whatever of inferiority or disparity; but having neither space nor time nor power to speak, however inadequately, of each among the hundred and thirty-eight poems which compose the now perfect book, I am compelled to choose, not quite at random, an example here and there of its highest and most

typical qualities. In the first book, for instance, of the first series, the divine poem on Ruth and Boaz may properly be taken as representative of that almost indefinable quality which hitherto has seemed more especially the gift of Dante: a fusion, so to speak, of sublimity with sweetness, the exaltation of loveliness into splendour and simplicity into mystery, such as glorifies the close of his Purgatory and the opening of his Paradise. Again, the majestic verses which bring Mahomet before us at his end strike a deeper impression into the memory than is left by the previous poem on the raising of Lazarus; and when we pass into the cycle of heroic or chivalrous legend we find those poems the loftiest and the loveliest which have in them most of that prophetic and passionate morality which makes the greatest poet, in this as in some other ages, as much a seer as a singer, an evangelist no less than an artist. Hugo, for all his dramatic and narrative mastery of effect, will always probably remind men rather of such poets as Dante or Isaiah than of such poets as Sophocles or Shakespeare. We cannot of course imagine the Florentine or the Hebrew endowed with his infinite variety of sympathies, of interests, and of powers; but as little can we imagine in the Athenian such height and depth of passion, in the Englishman such unquenchable and sleepless fire of moral and prophetic faith. And hardly in any one of these, though Shakespeare may perhaps be excepted, can we recognise the same buoyant and childlike exultation in such things as are the delight of a high-hearted child-in free glory of adventure and ideal daring, in the triumph and rapture of reinless imagination, which gives now and then some excess of godlike empire and superhuman kingship to their hands whom his hands have created, to the lips whose life is breathed into them from his own. By the Homeric stature of the soul he measures the heroic capacity of the sword. And indeed it is hardly in our century that men who do not wish to provoke laughter should venture to mock at a poet who puts a horde to flight before a hero, or strikes down strongholds by the lightning of a single will. No right and no power to disbelieve in the arm of Hercules or the voice of Jesus can rationally remain with those who have seen Garibaldi take a kingdom into the hollow of his hand, and not one man but a whole nation arise from the dead at the sound of the word of Mazzini.

Two out of the five heroic poems which compose the fourth book of the first series will always remain types of what the genius of Hugo could achieve in two opposite lines. All the music of morning, all the sunshine of romance, all the sweetness and charm of chivalry, will come back upon all readers at the gracious and radiant name of Aymerillot; all the blackness of darkness, rank with fumes of blood and loud with cries of torment, which covers in so many quarters the history, not romantic but actual, of the ages called ages of faith, will close in upon the memory which reverts to the direful Day of Kings. The sound of the final note struck in the latter poem remains in the mind as the echo of a crowning peal of thunder in the ear of one entranced and spell-stricken by the magnetism of storm. The Pyrenees belong to Hugo as the western coasts of Italy, Neapolitan or Tuscan, belong to Shelley; they can never again be done into words and translated into music as for once they have been by these. It can hardly be said that he who knows the Pyrenees has read Victor Hugo;

but certainly it may be said that he who knows Victor Hugo has seen the Pyrenees. From the author's prefatory avowal that his book contains few bright or smiling pictures, a reader would never have inferred that so many of its pages are fragrant with all the breath and radiant with all the bloom of April or May among the pine-woods and their mountain lawns, ablaze with ardent blossom and astir with triumphant song. Tragedy may be hard at hand, with all the human train of sorrows and passions and sins; but the glory of beauty, the loveliness of love, the exultation of noble duty and lofty labour in a stress of arduous joy, these are the influences that pervade the world and permeate the air of the poems which deal with the Christian cycle of heroic legend, whose crowning image is the ideal figure of the Cid. To this highest and purest type of mediæval romance or history the fancy of the great poet whose childhood was cradled in Spain turns and returns throughout the course of his threefold masterpiece with an almost national pride and passion of sublime delight. Once in the first part and once in the third his chosen hero is set before us in heroic verse, doing menial service for his father in his father's house, and again, in a king's palace, doing for humanity the sovereign service of tyrannicide. But in the second part it seems as though the poet could hardly, with his fullest effusion of lyric strength and sweetness, do enough to satisfy his loving imagination of the perfect knight, most faithful and most gentle and most terrible, whom he likens even to the very Pic du Midi in its majesty of solitude. Each fresh blast of verse has in it the ring of a golden clarion which proclaims in one breath the honour of the loyal soldier and the dishonour of the disloyal king. There can hardly be in any language a more precious and wonderful study of technical art in verse of the highest kind of simplicity than this Romancero du Cid, with its jet of luminous and burning song sustained without lapse or break through sixteen 'fyttes' of plain brief ballad metre. It is hard to say whether the one only master of all forms and kinds of poetry that ever left to all time the proof of his supremacy in all has shown most clearly by his use of its highest or his use of its simplest forms the innate and absolute equality of the French language as an instrument for poetry with the Greek of Æschylus and of Sappho, the English of Milton and of Shelley.

But among all Hugo's romantic and tragic poems of mediæval history or legend the two greatest are in my mind Eviradnus and Rathert. I cannot think it would be rash to assert that the loveliest love-song in the world, the purest and keenest rapture of lyric fancy, the sweetest and clearest note of dancing or dreaming music, is that which rings for ever in the ear which has once caught the matchless echo of such lines as these that must once more be quoted, as though all the world of readers had not long since known them by heart:—

Viens, sois tendre, je suis ivre. O les verts taillis mouillés! Ton souffle te fera suivre Des papillons réveillés.

Allons-nous-en par l'Autriche! Nous aurons l'aube à nos fronts; Je serai grand, et toi riche, Puisque nous nous aimerons.

I 2

Tu seras dame, et moi comte; Viens, mon cœur s'épanouit, Viens, nous conterons ce conte Aux étoiles de la nuit.

The poet would be as sure of a heavenly immortality in the hearts of men as any lyrist of Greece itself, who should only have written the fourteen stanzas of the song from which I have ventured to choose these three. All the sounds and shadows of a moonlit wilderness, all the dews and murmurs and breaths of midsummer midnight, have become for once articulate in such music as was never known even to Shakespeare's forest of Arden. In the heart of a poem so full of tragedy and terror that Hugo alone could have brightened it with his final touch of sunrise, this birdlike rapture breaks out as by some divine effect of unforbidden and blameless magic.

And yet, it may be said or thought, the master of masters has shown himself even greater in *Rathert* than in *Eviradnus*. This most tragic of poems, lit up by no such lyric interlude, stands unsurpassed even by its author for tenderness, passion, divine magnificence of righteous wrath, august and pitiless command of terror and pity. From the kingly and priestly conclave of debaters more dark than Milton's to the superb admonition of loyal liberty in speech that can only be silenced by murder, and again from the heavenly and heroic picture of childhood worshipped by old age to the monstrous banquet of massacre, when the son of the prostitute has struck his perjured stroke of state, the poem passes through a change of successive pageants each fuller of splendour and wonder, of loveliness or of horror, than the last. But the agony of the hero over the little

corpse of the child murdered with her plaything in her hand—the anguish that utters itself as in peal upon peal of thunder, broken by sobs of storm—the full crash of the final imprecation, succeeded again by such unspeakably sweet and piteous appeal to the little dead lips and eyes that would have answered yesterday—and at last the one crowning stroke of crime which calls down an answering stroke of judgment from the very height of heaven, for the comfort and refreshment and revival of all hearts—these are things of which no praise can speak aright. Shakespeare only, were he living, would be worthy to write on Hugo's Fabrice as Hugo has written on Shakespeare's Lear. History will forget the name of Bonaparte before humanity forgets the name of Ratbert.

But if this be the highest poem of all for passion and pathos and fire of terrible emotion, the highest in sheer sublimity of imagination is to my mind Zim-Zizimi. Again and again, in reading it for the first time, one thinks that surely now the utmost height is reached, the utmost faculty revealed, that can be possible for a spirit clothed only with human powers, armed only with human speech. And always one finds the next step forward to be yet once more a step upward, even to the very end and limit of them all. Neither in Homer nor in Milton, nor in the English version of Job or Ezekiel or Isaiah, is the sound of the roll and surge of measured music more wonderful than here. Even after the vision of the tomb of Belus the miraculous impression of splendour and terror, distinct in married mystery, and diverse in unity of warning, deepens and swells onward like a sea till we reach the incomparable psalm in praise of the beauty and the magic of womanhood made perfect and made awful in Cleopatra, which closes in horror at the touch of a hand more powerful than Orcagna's. The walls of the Campo Santo are fainter preachers and feebler pursuivants of the triumph of death than the pages of the poem which yet again renews its note of menace after menace and prophecy upon prophecy till the end. There is probably not one single couplet in all this sweet and bitter roll of song which could have been written by any poet less than the best or lower than the greatest of all time.

Passants, quelqu'un veut-il voir Cléopâtre au lit? Venez; l'alcôve est morne, une brume l'emplit; Cléopâtre est couchée à jamais : cette femme Fut l'éblouissement de l'Asie, et la flamme Que tout le genre humain avait dans son regard; Quand elle disparut, le monde fut hagard; Ses dents étaient de perle et sa bouche était d'ambre : Les rois mouraient d'amour en entrant dans sa chambre; Pour elle Ephractæus soumit l'Atlas, Sapor Vint d'Ozymandias saisir le cercle d'or, Mamylos conquit Suse et Tentyris détruite Et Palmyre, et pour elle Antoine prit la fuite : Entre elle et l'univers qui s'offraient à la fois Il hésita, lâchant le monde dans son choix. Cléopâtre égalait les Junons éternelles : Une chaîne sortait de ses vagues prunelles; O tremblant cœur humain, si jamais tu vibras, C'est dans l'étreinte altière et douce de ses bras ; Son nom seul enivrait; Strophus n'osait l'écrire; La terre s'éclairait de son divin sourire, À force de lumière et d'amour, effrayant ; Son corps semblait mêlé d'azur; en la voyant, Vénus, le soir, rentrait jalouse sous la nue; Cléopâtre embaumait l'Egypte : toute nue. Elle brûlait les yeux ainsi que le soleil; Les roses enviaient l'ongle de son orteil;

O vivants, allez voir sa tombe souveraine; Fière, elle était déesse et daignait être reine; L'amour prenait pour arc sa lèvre aux coins moqueurs; Sa beauté rendait fous les fronts, les sens, les cœurs, Et plus que les lions rugissants était forte; Mais bouchez-vous le nez si vous passez la porte.

At every successive stage of his task, the man who undertakes to glance over this great cycle of poems must needs incessantly call to mind the most worn and hackneyed of all quotations from its author's works-'I'en passe, et des meilleurs.' There is here no room, as surely there should nowhere now be any need, to speak at any length of the poems in which Roland plays the part of protagonist; first as the beardless champion of a five days' fight, and again as the deliverer whose hand could clear the world of a hundred human wolves in one continuous sword-sweep. There is hardly time allowed us for one poor word or two of tribute to such a crowning flower of song as La Rose de l'Infante, with its parable of the broken Armada made manifest in a wrecked fleet of drifting petals; to the superb and sonorous chant of the buccaneers, in which all the noise of lawless battle and stormy laughter passes off into the carol of mere triumphant love and trust; or even to the whole inner cycle of mystic and primæval legend which seeks utterance for the human sense of oppression or neglect by jealous or by joyous gods; for the wild profound revolt of riotous and trampled nature, the agony and passion and triumph of invincible humanity, the protest and witness of enduring earth against the passing shades of heaven, the struggle and the plea of eternal manhood against all transient forces of ephemeral and tyrannous godhead. Within the orbit of this epicycle one poem only of the first part, a star of strife and struggle, can properly be said to revolve; but the light of that planet has fire enough to animate with its reflex the whole concourse of stormy stars which illuminate the world-wide wrestle of the giants with the gods. The torch of revolt borne by the transfigured satyr, eyed like a god and footed like a beast, kindles the lamp of hopeful and laborious rebellion which dazzles us in the eye of the Titan who has seen beyond the world. In the song that struck silence through the triumph of amazed Olympus there is a sound and air as of the sea or the Book of Job. There may be something of Persian or Indian mysticism, there is more of universal and imaginative reason, in the great allegoric myth which sets forth here how the half-brute child of one poor planet has in him the seed, the atom, the principle of life everlasting, and dilates in force of it to the very type and likeness of the eternal universal substance which is spirit or matter of life; and before the face of his transfiguration the omnipresent and omnipotent gods who take each their turn to shine and thunder are all but shadows that pass away. Since the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind no ear has heard the burst of such a song; but this time it is the world that answers out of its darkness the lords and gods of creed and oracle, who have mastered and have not made it. And in the cry of its protest and the prophecy of its advance there is a storm of swelling music which is as the sound of the strength of rollers after the noise of the rage of breakers.

It is noticeable that the master of modern poets should have in the tone and colour of his genius more even of the Hebrew than the Greek. In his love of light and freedom, reason and justice, he is not of Jerusalem, but of Athens; but in the bent of his imagination, in the form and colour of his dreams, in the scope and sweep of his wide-winged spiritual flight, he is nearer akin to the great insurgent prophets of deliverance and restoration than to any poet of Athens except only their kinsman Æschylus. It is almost wholly of the Persian war, the pass of Thermopylæ, the strait of Euripus, that he sings when he sings of Hellas. All his might of hand, all his cunning of colour, all his measureless resources of sound and form and symbol, are put forth in the catalogue of nations and warriors subject to Xerxes. There is nothing in poetry so vast and tremendous of its kind as this pageant of immense and monstrous invasion. But indeed the choice of gigantic themes, the predominance of colossal effects, the prevalence of superhuman visions over the types and figures of human history or legend, may be regarded as a distinctive point of difference between the second and the first series. A typical example of the second is the poem which has added an eighth wonder built by music to the seven wonders of the world, which it celebrates in verse more surely wrought for immortality than they. Another is the song of the worm which takes up in answer to their chant of life and light and pride of place, and prolongs through measure after measure of rolling and reverberating verse, the note of a funereal and universal triumph, the protest and the proclamation of death. Another, attuned to that mighty music of meditation which rings through so many of the poems written in exile and loneliness, is the stately prophetic hymn which bears the superscription of All the Past and all the Future. This might seem to belong

to the sixth book of the Contemplations, in which the same note of proud and ardent faith was struck so often with such sovereignty of hand. As much might be said of the great 'abysmal' poem which closes the second series with a symphony of worlds and spirits. Other groups of poems, in like manner, bear signs of common or of diverse kinship to former works of a creator whose spirit has put life into so many of the same likeness, yet with no more sign of repetition or weary monotony than is traceable in the very handiwork of nature. The book of idyls is of one inspiration with the Chansons des Rues et des Bois; in both cases, as in so many of the poet's earlier lyric volumes, his incomparable fertility of speech and superb facility of verse leave almost an impression as of work done by way of exercise, as though he were writing to keep his hand in, or to show for a wager with incredulous criticism how long he could keep up the golden ball of metre, carve arabesques of the same pattern, play variations in the same key. But the Old Man's Idyl which closes the book belongs by kinship to another work of the poet's, more beloved and more precious to the inmost heart, if not more eminent for strength and cunning of hand, than any of these. In 'the voice of a child a year old' there is the same welling and bubbling melody which flows and laughs and murmurs and glitters through the adorable verses of L'Art d'être Grandpère, making dim with love and delight the reader's or the hearer's eyes. At last the language of babies has found its interpreter; and that, as might have been expected, in the greatest poet of his age.

> L'enfant apporte un peu de ce ciel dont il sort; Il ignore, il arrive; homme, tu le recueilles. Il a le tremblement des herbes et des feuilles.

La jaserie avant le langage est la fleur Qui précède le fruit, moins beau qu'elle, et meilleur, Si c'est être meilleur qu'être plus nécessaire.

A conclusion which may be doubted when we consider as follows:—

L'enfant fait la demande et l'ange la réponse; Le babil puéril dans le ciel bleu s'enfonce, Puis s'en revient, avec les hésitations Du moineau qui verrait planer les alcyons.

Can language or can thought be lovelier? if so, the one possible instance is to be sought in these succeeding verses:—

Quand l'enfant jase avec l'ombre qui le bénit, La fauvette, attentive, au rebord de son nid Se dresse, et ses petits passent, pensifs et frêles, Leurs têtes à travers les plumes de ses ailes ; La mère semble dire à sa couvée : Entends, Et tâche de parler aussi bien.

It seems and is not strange that the lips which distil such honey as this should be the same so often touched with a coal of fire from that 'altar of Righteousness' where Æschylus was wont to worship. The twenty-first section of the second series is in the main a renewal or completion of the work undertaken in the immortal *Châtiments*. Even in that awful and incomparable book of judgment such poems as *La Colère du Bronze*, and the two following on the traffic of servile clerical rapacity in matters of death and burial, would have stood high among the stately legions of satire which fill its living pages with the sound and the splendour of righteous battle for the right; but the verses

with which Hugo has branded the betrayer of Metz and Strasburg are hardly to be matched except by those with which, half a century ago, he branded the betrayer of the Duchess of Berry. Truly may all who read them cry out with the poet at their close,

Et qui donc maintenant dit qu'il s'est évadé?

In Le Cimetière & Eylau, a poem to which we have now in the third series of the book a most noble and exquisite pendant (Paroles de mon Oncle), all the Homeric side of a poet born of warlike blood comes out into proud and bright relief. There is no better fighting in the Iliad; it has the martial precision and practical fellow-feeling which animate in his battle-pieces the lagging verse of Walter Scott; and it has of course that omnipresent breath and light and fire of perfect poetry which a Scott or a Byron is never quite permitted to attain. Beside or even above these two poems, that other which commemorates the devotion of a Vendean peasant chief will be set in the hearts of all readers competent to appreciate either heroic action or heroic song.

The love of all high things which finds one form of expression in warlike sympathy with warriors who can live and die for something higher than personal credit or success takes another and as natural a shape in the poems which are inspired by love and worship of nature and her witness for liberty and purity and truth in the epic evangel of august and indomitable mountains. The sublimest cry of moral passion ever inspired by communion in spirit with these is uttered in the great poem on the Swiss mercenaries of the seventeenth century, which even among its fellows stands out eminent and radiant as an Alp at sunrise.

Mountain and cataract, the stars and the snows, never yet in any language found such a singer and interpreter as this. Two or three verses, two or three words, suffice for him to bring before us, in fresh and actual presence, the very breath of the hills or the sea, the very lights and sounds and spaces of clouded or sunlit air. Juvenal is not so strong in righteousness, nor Pindar so sublime in illustration, as the poet who borrowed from nature her highest symbols to illustrate the glory and the duty of righteous wrath and insuppressible insurrection against wrong-doing, when he wrote Le Régiment du baron Madruce.

L'homme s'est vendu. Soit. A-t-on dans le louage Compris le lac, le bois, la ronce, le nuage? La nature revient, germe, fleurit, dissout, Féconde, croît, décroît, rit, passe, efface tout. La Suisse est toujours là, libre. Prend-on au piège La précipice, l'ombre et la bise et la neige? Signe-t-on des marchés dans lesquels il soit dit Que l'Orteler s'enrôle et devient un bandit? Quel poing cyclopéen, dites, ô roches noires, Pourra briser la Dent de Morcle en vos mâchoires? Quel assembleur de bœufs pourra forger un joug Oui du pic de Glaris aille au piton de Zoug? C'est naturellement que les monts sont fidèles Et purs, avant la forme âpre des citadelles, Ayant reçu de Dieu des créneaux où, le soir, L'homme peut, d'embrasure en embrasure, voir Étinceler le fer de lance des étoiles. Est-il une araignée, aigle, qui dans ses toiles Puisse prendre la trombe et la rafale et toi? Quel chef recrutera le Salève? à quel roi Le Mythen dira-t-il: 'Sire, je vais descendre! Qu'après avoir dompté l'Athos, quelque Alexandre, Sorte de héros monstre aux cornes de taureau, Aille donc relever sa robe à la Jungfrau!

Comme la vierge, ayant l'ouragan sur l'épaule, Crachera l'avalanche à la face du drôle!

Non, rien n'est mort ici. Tout grandit, et s'en vante. L'Helvétie est sacrée, et la Suisse est vivante; Ces monts sont des héros et des religieux; Cette nappe de neige aux plis prodigieux D'où jaillit, lorsqu'en mai la tiède brise ondoie, Toute une floraison folle d'air et de joie, Et d'où sortent des lacs et des flots murmurants, N'est le linceul de rien, excepté des tyrans.

This glorious poem of the first series finds a glorious echo in the twenty-fifth division of the second; even as the Pyrenean cycle which opened in the first series is brought in the second to fuller completion of equal and corresponsive achievement. It is wonderful, even in this vast world of poetic miracle where nothing is other than wonderful, that Masferrer should be equal to Aymerillot in frank majesty of beauty; that even after Le Parricide a fresh depth of tragic terror should be sounded by Gaiffer-Jorge; and that after all he had already written on fatherhood and sonship, on duty and chivalry, on penitence and pride, Victor Hugo should have struck so new and so profound a note as rings in every line of La Paternité.

But of all echoes and of all responses which reverberate from end to end of these three great sections of song, the very sweetest, and perhaps the very deepest, are those evoked by love of little children and compassionate reverence for the poor. If but one division were to be left us out of all the second series, and fate or chance, comparatively compassionate in its cruelty, gave us our choice which this one should be, the best judgments might perhaps decide to preserve the twenty-third at all events. What the words 'realism' and 'naturalism' do naturally and really signify in matters of art, the blatant babblers who use them to signify the photography of all things abject might learn, if shallow insolence and unclean egotism were suddenly made capable of learning, by the study of only the two poems which set before us in two different forms the strength of weakness in the child whose love redeems his father from death and the child who can find no comfort but in death for the lack of a father's love. There is nothing in Homer, in Dante, or in Shakespeare, the three only poets who can properly be cited for comparison, of a pathos more poignant in its bitter perfection of sweetness.

Among the many good things which seem, for the lovers of poetry, to have come out of one and so great an evil as the long exile of Hugo from his country, there is none better or greater than the spiritual inhalation of breeze and brine into the very heart of his genius, the miraculous impregnation of his solitary Muse by the sea-wind. This influence could not naturally but combine with the lifelong influence of all noble sympathies to attract his admiration and his pity towards the poor folk of the shore, and to produce from that sense of compassion for obscurer sorrows and brotherhood with humbler heroism than his own such work as the poem which describes the charity of a fisherman's wife towards the children of her dead neighbour. It has all the beautiful precision and accurate propriety of detail which distinguish the finest idyls of Theocritus or Tennyson, with a fervour of pathetic and imaginative emotion which Theocritus never attained, and which Tennyson has attained but once. All the horror of death,

all the trouble and mystery of darkness, seem as we read to pass into our fancy with the breath of pervading night, and to vanish with the husband's entrance at sunrise before the smile with which the wife draws back the curtains of the cradle.

This poem, which so many hearts must have treasured among their choicest memories for now so many years, has found at length its fellow in the final volume of the book. There is even more savour of the sea in the great lyric landscape called Les paysans au bord de la mer than in the idyllic interior called Les pauvres gens. There we felt the sea-wind and saw the sea-mist through the chinks of door and window; but here we feel all the sweep of the west wind's wings, and see all the rush of rain along the stormy shore that the flock of leaping waves has whitened with the shreddings of their fleece. We remember in Les Voix Intérieures the all but matchless music of the song of the sea-wind's trumpet, and in the notes of this new tune we find at last that music matched and deepened and prolonged. In the great lyric book which gives us the third of the four blasts blown from Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit, there are visions as august and melodies as austere as this; but outside the vast pale of the master's work we should look for the likeness of such songs in vain. The key of all its tenderness if not of all its terror is struck in these two first verses.

> Les pauvres gens de la côte, L'hiver, quand la mer est haute Et qu'il fait nuit, Viennent où finit la terre Voir les flots pleins de mystère Et pleins de bruit.

Ils sondent la mer sans bornes;
Ils pensent aux écueils mornes
Et triomphants;
L'orpheline pâle et seule
Crie: ô mon père! et l'aïeule
Dit: mes enfants!

The verses which translate the landscape are as absolutely incomparable in their line as those which render the emotion of the watchers. Witness this:—

Et l'on se met en prières,
Pendant que joncs et bruyères
Et bois touffus,
Vents sans borne et flots sans nombre,
Jettent dans toute cette ombre
Des cris confus.

Here, as usual, it is the more tragic aspect of the waters that would appear to have most deeply impressed the sense or appealed to the spirit of Victor Hugo. He seems to regard the sea with yet more of awe than of love, as he may be said to regard the earth with even more of love than of awe. He has put no song of such sweet and profound exultation, such kind and triumphant motherhood, into the speaking spirit of the sea as into the voice of the embodied earth. He has heard in the waves no word so bountiful and benignant as the message of such verses as these:—

La terre est calme auprès de l'océan grondeur;
La terre est belle; ellé a la divine pudeur
De se cacher sous les feuillages;
Le printemps son amant vient en mai la baiser;
Elle envoie au tonnerre altier pour l'apaiser
La fumée humble des villages.

Ne frappe pas, tonnerre. Ils sonts petits, ceux-ci.
La terre est bonne; elle est grave et sévère aussi;
Les roses sont pures comme elle;
Quiconque pense, espère et travaille lui plaît;
Et l'innocence offerte à tout homme est son lait,
Et la justice est sa mamelle.

La terre cache l'or et montre les moissons;
Elle met dans le flanc des fuyantes saisons
Le germe des saisons prochaines,
Dans l'azur les oiseaux qui chuchotent: aimons!
Et les sources au fond de l'ombre, et sur les monts
L'immense tremblement des chênes.

The loving loveliness of these divine verses is in sharp contrast with the fierce resonance of those in which the sea's defiance is cast as a challenge to the hopes and dreams of mankind:—

Je suis la vaste mêlée, Reptile, étant l'onde, ailée, Étant le vent; Force et fuite, haine et vie, Houle immense, poursuivie Et poursuivant.

The motion of the sea was never till now so perfectly done into words as in these three last lines; but anyone to whom the water was as dear or dearer than the land at its loveliest would have found a delight as of love no less conceivable than a passion as of hatred in the more visible and active life of waves, and at least as palpable to the 'shaping spirit of imagination.' It remains true, after all, for the greatest as for the humblest, that in the words of one of the very few poets whose verses are fit to quote even after a verse of Hugo's—

we receive but what we give, And in our life alone doth nature live;

so far, at least, as her life concerns us, and is perceptible or appreciable by our spirit or our sense. A magnificent instance of purely dramatic vision, in which the lyric note is tempered to the circumstance of the speakers with a kind of triumphant submission and severe facility, is *La Chanson des Doreurs de Proues*. The poet's unequalled and unapproached variety in mastery of metre and majesty of colour and splendid simplicity of style, no less exact than sublime, and no less accurate than passionate, could hardly be better shown than by comparison of the opening verses with the stanza cited above.

Nous sommes les doreurs de proues. Les vents, tournant comme des roues, Sur la verte rondeur des eaux Mêlent les lueurs et les ombres, Et dans les plis des vagues sombres Traînent les obliques vaisseaux.

La bourrasque décrit des courbes, Les vents sont tortueux et fourbes, L'archer noir souffle dans son cor, Ces bruits s'ajoutent aux vertiges, Et c'est nous qui dans ces prodiges Faisons rôder des spectres d'or.

Car c'est un spectre que la proue. Le flot l'étreint, l'air la secoue; Fière, elle sort de nos bazars Pour servir aux éclairs de cible, Et pour être un regard terrible Parmi les sinistres hasards.

It is more than fifty years since Les Orientales rose radiant upon the world of letters, and the hand which gave them to mankind has lost so little of its cunning that we are wellnigh tempted to doubt whether then, for all its skill and sureness of touch, it had quite the same strength and might of magnificent craftsmanship as now. There was fire as well as music on the lips of the young man, but the ardour of the old man's song seems even deeper and keener than the passion of his past. The fervent and majestic verses of Tune 2, 1883, strike at starting the note of measureless pity and immeasurable indignation which rings throughout the main part of the fifth and last volume almost louder and fuller, if possible, than it was wont. All Victor Hugo, we may say, is in this book; it is as one of those ardent evening skies in which sunrise and sunset seem one in the flush of overarching colour which glows back from the west to the east with reverberating bloom and fervour of rose-blossom and fire. There is life enough in it, enough of the breath and spirit and life-blood of living thought, to vivify a whole generation of punier souls and feebler hearts with the heat of his fourscore years. It may be doubted whether there ever lived a poet and leader of men to whom these glorious verses would be so closely applicable as to their writer.

Un grand esprit en marche a ses rumeurs, ses houles, Ses chocs, et fait frémir profondément les foules, Et remue en passant le monde autour de lui. On est épouvanté si l'on n'est ébloui; L'homme comme un nuage erre et change de forme; Nul, si petit qu'il soit, échappe au souffle énorme; Les plus humbles, pendant qu'il parle, ont le frisson. Ainsi quand, évadé dans le vaste horizon, L'aquilon qui se hâte et qui cherche aventure Tord la pluie et l'éclair, comme de sa ceinture Une fille défait en souriant le nœud, Quand l'immense vent gronde et passe, tout s'émeut, Pas un brin d'herbe au fond des ravins, que ne touche Cette rapidité formidable et farouche.

And this wind 'bloweth where it listeth': now it comes to us charged with all the heart of all the roses in the world; its breath when it blows towards Greece has in it a murmur as of Shelley's Epipsychidion; the caress of its love-making has all the freedom and all the purity of Blake's; now it passes by us in darkness, from depth to depth of the bitter mystery of night. A vision of ruined worlds, the floating purgatorial prisons of ruined souls, adrift as hulks on the sea of darkness everlasting, shows us the harvest in eternity of such seed as was sown in time by the hands of such guides and rulers of men as we hear elsewhere speaking softly with each other in the shadows, within hail of the confessional and the scaffold. The loftiest words of counsel sound sweeter in the speech of this great spirit than the warmest whispers of pleasure; and again, the heaviest stroke of damning satire is succeeded by the tenderest touch of a compassion that would leave not a bird in captivity. The hand that opens the cage-door is the same which has just turned the key on the braggart swordsman, neither 'victorious' nor 'dead,' but condemned to everlasting prison behind the bars of iron verse.

But the two long poems which dominate the book, like two twin summits clothed round with fiery cloud and crowned with stormy sunshine, tower equal in height and mass of structure with the stateliest in the two parts preceding. The voice that rolls throughout Les Quatre Jours d'Elciis the thunder of its burning words reawakens and prolongs the echo of Félibien's pity and wrath over the murdered corpse of a child unborn; we recognise in the speaker a kinsman of Welf's, the unconquerable old castellan of Osbor, delivered only by an act of charity into the treacherous hands of the princes whom his citadel had so long defied. Of Elciis, as of him, the poet might have said—

Si la mer prononçait des noms dans ses marées, O vieillard, ce serait des noms comme le tien.

Such names will no doubt provoke the soft superior smile of a culture too refined for any sort of enthusiasm but the elegant ecstasy of self-worship; and such simplicity will excite, on the other hand, a deep-mouthed bray of scorn from the whole school or church whose apostle in France was St. Joseph de Maistre, in England St. Thomas Coprostom, late of Craigenputtock and Chelsea; the literary lappers of imaginary blood, the inkhorn swordsmen and spokesmen of immaterial iron. The rage of their contempt for such as Hugo, the loathing of their scorn for such as Shelley, ought long since to have abashed the believers in principles which find no abler defenders or more effective champions than these.

For it is true that the main truths preached and enforced and insisted on by such fanatical rhetoricians as Milton, as Mazzini, or as Hugo, are as old as the very notion of right and wrong, as the rudest and crudest conception of truth itself; and it is undeniable that the Gospel according to St. Coprostom has the invaluable merit of pungent eccentricity

and comparatively novel paradox. The evangelist of 'golden silence'—whose own speech, it may be admitted, was 'quite other' than 'silvern'—is logically justified in his blatant but ineffable contempt for the dull old doctrines of mere mercy and righteousness, of liberty that knows no higher law than duty, of duty that depends for its existence on the existence of liberty. Such a creed, in the phrase of a brother philosopher whose 'reminiscences' may be gathered from Shakespeare, and whose views of his contemporaries were identical in tone and expression with the opinions of Mr. Carlyle on his, was mouldy before our grandsires had nails on their toes. It is far more intelligent, more original, more ingenious than all the old cant and rant against priests and kings and vowbreakers and blood-spillers, to discover the soul of goodness in Ratbert the Second or Napoleon the Third, and observingly distil it out into analytic and monodramatic blank verse. And it will never be said that this reaction against the puerile or senile preference of right to wrong and principle to prosperity has not been carried far enough in our time. Carlyle, the man of brass, and Musset, the man of clay, as far apart on all other points as two writers of genius could well be, have shown themselves at one in high-souled scorn for 'principles of mere rebellion' such as Landor's and Milton's, or for such 'belief in a new Brutus' as might disturb the dream of Augustulus. But, even as an old paradox becomes with time a commonplace, so does an old commonplace become in its turn a paradox; and a generation whose poets and historians have long blown the trumpet before the legitimacy of Romanoffs or the bastardy of Bonapartes may properly be startled and scandalized at the childish eccentricity of an old-world idealist who

maintains his obsolete and preposterous belief that massacre is murder, that robbery is theft, and that perjury is treason. No newer doctrine, no sounder philosophy, no riper wisdom than this, can be gathered from the declamations of those idle old men—as Goneril, for example, would have called them—who speak this poet's mind again and again in verse which has no more variety of splendour or magnificence of music than the sea.

Hélas, on voit encor les astres se lever, L'aube sur l'Apennin jeter sa clarté douce, L'oiseau faire son nid avec des brins de mousse, La mer battre les rocs dans ses flux et reflux, Mais la grandeur des cœurs c'est ce qu'on ne voit plus.

There is nothing ingenious in that; it is no better, intellectually considered, than a passage of Homer or Isaiah.

But though every verse has the ring of tested gold, and every touch gives notice of the master's hand, yet the glory even of these Four Days is eclipsed by the Vision of Dante. Far apart and opposite as they stand in all matters of poetic style and method—Dante writing with the rigid and reserved concision of a Tacitus, Hugo with the rushing yet harmonious profusion of a Pindar—the later master is the only modern poet who could undertake without absurdity or presumption to put words worthy of Dante into Dante's mouth. The brazen clatter of Byron's Prophecy was not redeemed or brought into tune by the noble energy and sound insight of the political sympathies expressed in the accent of a stump-orator to the tune of a barrel-organ. But a verse of Hugo's falls often as solid and weighty and sure, as full in significance of perfect and pregnant sound, as even a

verse of Alighieri's. He therefore, but he alone, had the power and the right to call up the spirit of Dante now thirty years ago, and bid it behold all the horrors of Europe in 1853; the Europe of Haynau and Radetzky, of Nicholas the First and Napoleon the Last. Any great modern poet's notion of an everlasting hell must of course be less merely material than Dante's mechanism of hot and cold circles, fire and ice, ordure and mire; but here is the same absolute and equitable assent to justice, the same fierce and ardent fidelity to conscience, the same logic and the same loyalty as his.

O sentence! ô peine sans refuge! Tomber dans le silence et la brume à jamais! D'abord quelque clarté des lumineux sommets Vous laisse distinguer vos mains désespérées. On tombe, on voit passer des formes effarées, Bouches ouvertes, fronts ruisselants de sueur, Des visages hideux qu'éclaire une lueur. Puis on ne voit plus rien. Tout s'efface et recule. La nuit morne succède au sombre crépuscule. On tombe. On n'est pas seul dans ces limbes d'en bas; On sent frissonner ceux qu'on ne distingue pas ; On ne sait si ce sont des hydres ou des hommes; On se sent devenir les larves que nous sommes; On entrevoit l'horreur des lieux inapercus, Et l'abîme au-dessous, et l'abîme au-dessus. Puis tout est vide! on est le grain que le vent sème. On n'entend pas le cri qu'on a poussé soi-même ; On sent les profondeurs qui s'emparent de vous ; Les mains ne peuvent plus atteindre les genoux ; On lève au ciel les yeux et l'on voit l'ombre horrible; On est dans l'impalpable, on est dans l'invisible; Des souffles par moments passent dans cette nuit. Puis on ne sent plus rien .-- Pas un vent, pas un bruit,

Pas un souffle; la mort, la nuit; nulle rencontre; Rien, pas même une chute affreuse ne se montre: Et l'on songe à la vie, au soleil, aux amours, Et l'on pense toujours, et l'on tombe toujours!

The resurrection of the victims to give evidence at the summons of the archangel—a heavy cloud of witnesses,

Triste, livide, énorme, ayant un air de rage-

men bound to the yoke like beasts, women with bosoms gashed by the whip, children with their skulls cleft open—is direful as any less real and actual vision of the elder hell.

Les cris d'enfant surtout venaient à mon oreille; Car, dans cette nuit-là, gouffre où l'équité veille, La voix des innocents sur toute autre prévaut, C'est le cri des enfants qui monte le plus haut, Et le vagissement fait le bruit du tonnerre.

The appeal for justice which follows, with its enumeration of horrors unspeakable except by history and poetry, is followed in its turn by the evocation of the soldiers whom this army of martyrs has with one voice designated to the angel of judgment as their torturers and murderers. The splendid and sonorous verses in which the muster of these legions after legions, with their garments rolled in blood, is made to defile before the eyes of reader or hearer, can be matched only by the description of the Swiss mercenaries in Le Régiment du baron Madruce.

Un grand vautour doré les guidait comme un phare. Tant qu'ils étaient au fond de l'ombre, la fanfare, Comme un aigle agitant ses bruyants ailerons, Chantait claire et joyeuse au front des escadrons, Trompettes et tambours sonnaient, et des centaures Frappaient des ronds de cuivre entre leurs mains sonores; Mais, dès qu'ils arrivaient devant le flamboiement, Les clairons effarés se taisaient brusquement, Tout ce bruit s'éteignait. Reculant en désordre, Leurs chevaux se cabraient et cherchaient à les mordre, Et la lance et l'épée échappaient à leur poing.

Challenged to make answer, the assassins of Italy and Hungary plead that they were but the sword, their captains were the hand. These are summoned in their turn, and cast their crimes in turn upon the judges who bade them shed blood and applauded their bloodshedding in the name of law and justice. And the judges and lawgivers are summoned in their stead.

Ces hommes regardaient l'ange d'un air surpris ·
Comme, en lettres de feu, rayonnait sur sa face
Son nom, Justice, entre eux ils disaient à voix basse :
Que veut dire ce mot qu'il porte sur son front?

Charged with their complicity in all the public crime and shame and horror of their period, these in turn cast the burden of their wrong-doing on the princes who commanded them and they obeyed, seeing how the priests and soothsayers had from all time assured them that kings were the images of God. The images of God are summoned, and appear, in the likeness of every form of evil imaginable by man.

Devant chaque fantôme, en la brume glacée, Ayant le vague aspect d'une croix renversée, Venait un glaive nu, ferme et droit dans le vent, Qu'aucun bras ne tenait et qui semblait vivant. Strange shapes of winged and monstrous beasts were harnessed to the chariots on which the thrones of the earth were borne forward. The figure seated on the last of them will be recognisable beyond all possibility of mistake by any reader whose eyes have ever rested on a face which beyond most human faces bore the visible image and superscription of the soul behind it.

Les trônes approchaient sous les lugubres cieux;
On entendait gémir autour des noirs essieux
La clameur de tous ceux qu'avaient broyés leurs roues;
Ils venaient, ils fendaient l'ombre comme des proues;
Sous un souffle invisible ils semblaient se mouvoir;
Rien n'était plus étrange et plus farouche à voir
Que ces chars effrayants tourbillonnant dans l'ombre.
Dans le gouffre tranquille où l'humanité sombre,
Ces trônes de la terre apparaissaient hideux.

Le dernier qui venait, horrible au milieu d'eux, Était à chaque marche encombré de squelettes Et de cadavres froids aux bouches violettes, Et le plancher rougi fumait, de sang baigné : Le char qui le portait dans l'ombre était traîné Par un hibou tenant dans sa griffe une hache. Un être aux yeux de loup, homme par la moustache, Au sommet de ce char s'agitait étonné. Et se courbait furtif, livide et couronné. Pas un de ces césars à l'allure guerrière Ne regardait cet homme. A l'écart, et derrière, Vêtu d'un noir manteau qui semblait un linceul, Espèce de lépreux du trône, il venait seul ; Il posait les deux mains sur sa face morose Comme pour empêcher qu'on y vît quelque chose ; Quand parfois il ôtait ses mains en se baissant, En lettres qui semblaient faites avec du sang On lisait sur son front ces trois mots:—Je le jure.

It is a fearful thing, said the Hebrew, to fall into the hands of the living God; and it is a fearful thing for a male-factor to fall into the hands of an ever-living poet. The injured Cæsars of Rome—Tiberius, for example, and Domitian—have not even yet been delivered by the most conscientious efforts of German and Anglo-German Cæsarists out of the prison whose keys are kept by Juvenal; and a greater than Juvenal is here.

Summoned to make answer to the charge of the angel of judgment, even these also have their resource for evasion, and cast all their crimes upon the Pope.

Il nous disait: Je suis celui qui parle aux rois; Quiconque me résiste et me brave est impie. Ce qu'ici-bas j'écris, là-haut Dieu le copie. L'église, mon épouse, éclose au mont Thabor, A fait de la doctrine une cage aux fils d'or, Et comme des oiseaux j'y tiens toutes les âmes.

This man had blessed the murderers in their triumph, and cursed their victims in the grave:—

Sa ceinture servait de corde à nos potences.

Il liait de ses mains l'agneau sous nos sentences;

Et quand on nous criait: Grâce! il nous criait: Feu!

C'est à lui que le mal revient. Voilà, grand Dieu,

Ce qu'il a fait: voilà ce qu'il nous a fait faire.

Cet homme était le pôle et l'axe de la sphère;

Il est le responsable et nous le dénonçons!

Seigneur, nous n'avons fait que suivre ses leçons,

Seigneur, nous n'avons fait que suivre son exemple.

And the pontiff whose advent and whose promises had been hailed with such noble trust and acclaimed with such noble thankfulness by those who believed in him as a deliverer—by Landor among others, and by Hugo himself—the Caiaphas-Iscariot whose benediction had consecrated massacre and anointed perjury with the rancid oil of malodorous gladness above its fellows in empire and in crime—is summoned out of darkness to receive sentence by the sevenfold sounding of trumpets.

Vêtu de lin plus blanc qu'un encensoir qui fume, Il avait, spectre blême aux idoles pareil, Les baisers de la foule empreints sur son orteil, Dans sa droite un bâton comme l'antique archonte, Sur son front la tiare, et dans ses yeux la honte. De son cou descendait un long manteau doré, Et dans son poignet gauche il tenait, effaré, Comme un voleur surpris par celui qu'il dérobe, Des clefs qu'il essayait de cacher sous sa robe. Il était effrayant à force de terreur.

Quand surgit ce vieillard, on vit dans la lueur L'ombre et le mouvement de quelqu'un qui se penche. A l'apparition de cette robe blanche, Au plus noir de l'abîme un tonnerre gronda.

Then from all points of the immeasurable spaces, from the womb of the cloud and the edge of the pit, is witness given against Pope Pius IX. by the tyrants and the victims, mothers and children and old men, the judges and the judged, the murderers mingling with the murdered, great and small, obscure and famous.

> Tous ceux que j'avais vus passer dans les ténèbres, Avançant leur front triste, ouvrant leur œil terni, Fourmillement affreux qui peuplait l'infini, Tous ces spectres, vivant, parlant, riant naguère, Martyrs, bourreaux, et gens du peuple et gens de guerre,

Regardant l'homme blanc d'épouvante ébloui, Élevèrent la main et crièrent : C'est lui.

Et pendant qu'ils criaient, sa robe devint rouge.

Au fond du gouffre où rien ne tressaille et ne bouge Un écho répéta:—C'est lui!—Les sombres rois Dirent:—C'est lui! c'est lui! voilà sa croix! Les clefs du paradis sont dans ses mains fatales.— Et l'homme-loup, debout sur les cadavres pâles Dont le sang tiède encor tombait dans l'infini, Cria d'une voix rauque et sourde:—Il m'a béni!

A judgment less terrible than what follows is that by which Dante long ago made fast the gates of hell upon Nicholas and Boniface and Clement with one stroke of his inevitable hand. The ghastly agony of the condemned is given with all the bitterest realism of the great elder antipapist who sent so many vicars of Christ to everlasting torment for less offences than those of Mastai-Ferretti.

Lui se tourna vers l'ange en frissonnant,
Et je vis le spectacle horrible et surprenant
D'un homme qui vieillit pendant qu'on le regarde.
L'agonie éteignit sa prunelle hagarde,
Sa bouche bégaya, son jarret se rompit,
Ses cheveux blanchissaient sur son front décrépit,
Ses tempes se ridaient comme si les années
S'étaient subitement sur sa face acharnées,
Ses yeux pleuraient, ses dents claquaient comme au gibet
Les genoux d'un squelette, et sa peau se plombait,
Et, stupide, il baissait, à chaque instant plus pâle,
Sa tête qu'écrasait la tiare papale.

From the sentence passed upon him after the avowal extorted by the angel of doom that he has none in the

world above him but God alone on whom to cast the responsibility of his works, not a word may be taken away for the purpose of quotation, as not a word could have been added to it by Dante or by Ezekiel himself. But about the eternity of his damnation there is not, happily for the human conscience, any manner of doubt possible; it must endure as long as the poem which proclaims it: in other words, as long as the immortality of poetry itself.

This great and terrible poem, the very crown or copingstone of all the *Châtiments*, has a certain affinity with two others in which the poet's yearning after justice and mercy has borne his passionate imagination as high and far as here. In *Sultan Mourad* his immeasurable and incomparable depth of pity and charity seems wellnigh to have swallowed up all sense of necessary retribution: it is perhaps because the portentous array of crimes enumerated is remote in time and place from all experience of ours that conscience can allow the tenderness and sublimity of its inspiration to justify the moral and ratify the sentence of the poem:—

> Viens! tu fus bon un jour, sois à jamais heureux. Entre, transfiguré! tes crimes ténébreux, O roi, derrière toi s'effacent dans les gloires; Tourne la tête, et vois blanchir tes ailes noires.

But in the crowning song of all the great three cycles every need and every instinct of the spirit may find the perfect exaltation of content. The vast and profound sense of ultimate and inevitable equity which animates every line of it is as firm and clear as the solid and massive splendour of its articulate expression. The date of it is outside and beyond the lapse of the centuries of time; but the rule of

the law of righteousness is there more evident and indisputable than ever during the flight of these. Hardly in the Hebrew prophecies is such distinct and vivid sublimity, as of actual and all but palpable vision, so thoroughly impregnated with moral and spiritual emotion. Not a verse of all that strike root into the memory for ever but is great alike by imagination and by faith. In such a single line as this—

Que qui n'entendit pas le remords l'entendrait-

there is the very note of conscience done into speech, cast into form, forged into substance

Avec de l'équité condensée en airain.

But this couplet, for immensity of imaginative range, is of one birth with the sublimest verses in the Book of Job:—

Et toute l'épouvante éparse au ciel est sœur De cet impénétrable et morne avertisseur.

From the magnificent overture to the second series, in which the poet has embodied in audible and visible symbol the vision whence this book was conceived—a vision so far surpassing the perhaps unconsciously imitative inspiration of the Apocalypse, with its incurably lame and arduously prosaic efforts to reproduce the effect or mimic the majesty of earlier prophecies, that we are amazed if not scandalized to find that book actually bracketed in one sublime passage of this prelude with the greatest spiritual poem in the world, the Oresteia of Æschylus—the reader would infer that any student wishing to give a notion of the Légende des Siècles ought to have dwelt less than I have done upon a few of its innumerable beauties, and more than I have done upon the

impression of its incomparable grandeur. But samples of pure sweetness and beauty are more easily and perhaps more profitably detached for quotation from their context than samples of a sublimity which can only be felt by full and appreciative study of an entire and perfect poem. And it is rather from the prelude itself than from any possible commentary on it that a thoughtful and careful reader will seek to gather the aim and meaning of the book. It is there likened to a vast disjointed ruin lit by gleams of light—'le reste effrayant de Babel'—a palace and a charnel in one, built by doom for death to dwell in :—

Où se posent pourtant parfois, quand elles l'osent, De la façon dont l'aile et le rayon se posent, La liberté, lumière, et l'espérance, oiseau.

But over and within this book-

traduit Du passé, du tombeau, du gouffre et de la nuit—

faith shines as a kindling torch, hope breathes as a quickening wind, love burns as a cleansing fire. It is tragic, not with the hopeless tragedy of Dante or the all but hopeless tragedy of Shakespeare. Whether we can or cannot share the infinite hope and inviolable faith to which the whole active and suffering life of the poet has borne such unbroken and imperishable witness, we cannot in any case but recognise the greatness and heroism of his love for mankind. As in the case of Æschylus it is the hunger and thirst after righteousness, the deep desire for perfect justice in heaven as on earth, which would seem to assure the prophet's inmost heart of its final triumph by the prevalence of wisdom and of light over all claims and all pleas established or asserted by the children of darkness, so in the case of Victor Hugo is it the hunger and thirst after reconciliation, the love of loving-kindness, the master passion of mercy, which persists in hope and insists on faith, even in face of the hardest and darkest experience through which a nation or a man can pass. When evil was most triumphant throughout Europe, he put forth in a single book of verse, published with strange difficulty against incredible impediments, such a protest as would entitle him to say, in the very words he has given to the Olympian of old—

Quand, dans le saint pæan par les mondes chanté, L'harmonie amoindrie avorte ou dégénère, Je rends le rhythme aux cieux par un coup de tonnerre:

and now more than ever would the verses that follow befit the lips of their author, if speaking in his own person:—

Mon crâne plein d'échos, plein de lueurs, plein d'yeux, Est l'antre éblouissant du grand Pan radieux; En me voyant on croit entendre le murmure De la ville habitée et de la moisson mûre, Le bruit du gouffre au chant de l'azur réuni, L'onde sur l'océan, le vent dans l'infini, Et le frémissement des deux ailes du cygne.

It is held unseemly to speak of the living as we speak of the dead; when Victor Hugo has joined the company of his equals, but apparently not till then, it will seem strange to regard the giver of all the gifts we have received from him with less than love that deepens into worship, than worship that brightens into love. Meantime it is only in the phrase of one of his own kindred, poet and exile and prophet of a darker age than his, that the last word should here be spoken of the man by whose name our century will be known for ever to all ages and nations that keep any record or memory of what was highest and most memorable in the spiritual history of the past:—

Onorate l' altissimo poeta.

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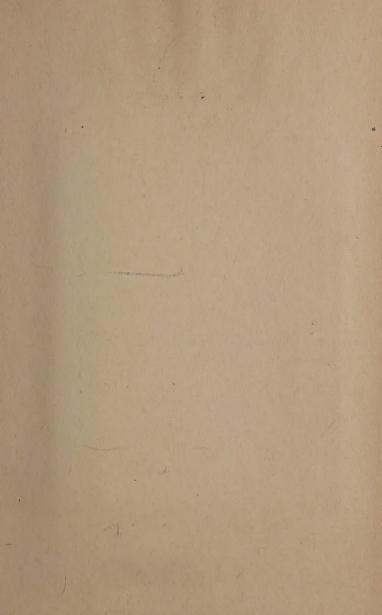
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